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Surviving the numbers

I regularly search through classic car auction sites simply because I like to keep an eye on what's increasing in value and what's not. One of the questions that gets asked regularly is 'Does the car have matching numbers?' This terminology can mean different things to different people, but I suspect that what people are asking is 'Does the car still retain its original drivetrain?'.

For the purists among us, this can mean checking that the drivetrain is completely original to the car. Is the engine correctly stamped, in some cases with several numbers that match those on the vehicle's VIN? These raised numbers, often visible on the vehicle's engine block, provide the series number, displacement range, and date and location of its manufacture. Then there are other engine items such as the cylinder head, intake manifold, exhaust manifold, carburettor, and distributor that on some vehicles wear part numbers, including date codes, that can be referenced against the vehicle's build date and checked for correctness. The same applies to the transmission and differential casting numbers and date codes. Everything that can be moulded with codes, even down to tail-light lenses, can be important to those wishing to invest in their dream classic.

Other common queries relate to 'barn finds' and 'survivors'. Barn finds are simply that — a car that's literally been dragged out of an old barn. In most cases, they will be in need of a full restoration. True survivors are a little harder to come by and are often highly sought after. Some of these cars will appear scruffy. Original paint with genuine patina will often show signs of wear and tear. The interior will be in less than pristine condition; likewise, an engine bay will have been left untouched for decades. But they are valued because they are complete, original, and honest.

There are also those very rare vehicles that have managed to survive the test of time in pristine condition. They have been lovingly cared for by a number of owners, despite having been used and displaying mileage commensurate with their age. To find one with low mileage is indeed a bonus, and to see one advertised with virtually no mileage definitely requires further investigating.

But, for classic car hunters who are not particularly concerned with all of this and are just searching for a practical and reliable classic car to enjoy, attend local club runs and events in and tinker with, then there's plenty to choose from, depending on your preference and budget. ■

Ashley Webb
Editor

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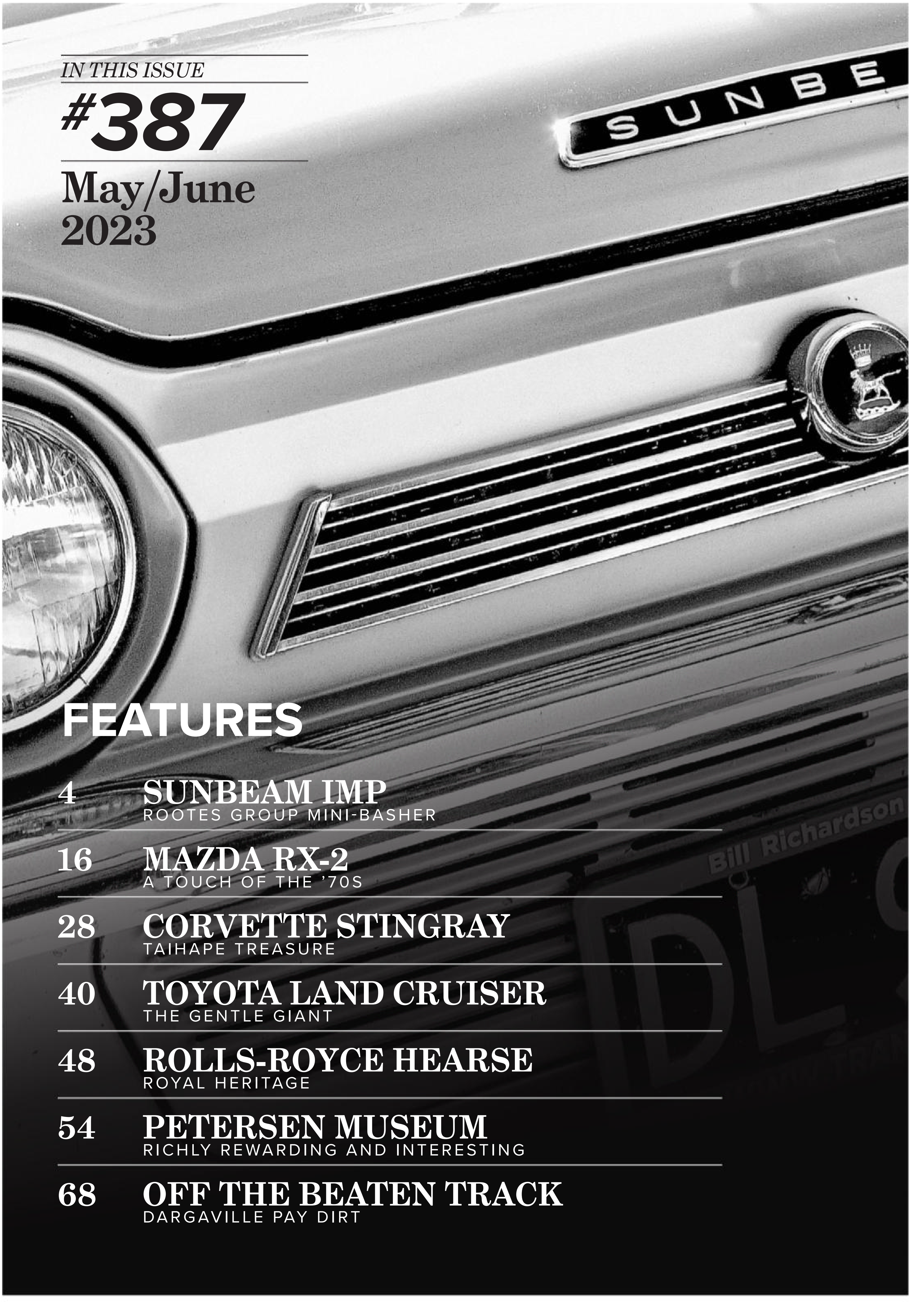


IN THIS ISSUE

#387

May/June
2023

FEATURES

4 **SUNBEAM IMP**
ROOTES GROUP MINI-BASHER

16 **MAZDA RX-2**
A TOUCH OF THE ’70S

28 **CORVETTE STINGRAY**
TAIHAPE TREASURE

40 **TOYOTA LAND CRUISER**
THE GENTLE GIANT

48 **ROLLS-ROYCE HEARSE**
ROYAL HERITAGE

54 **PETERSEN MUSEUM**
RICHLY REWARDING AND INTERESTING

68 **OFF THE BEATEN TRACK**
DARGAVILLE PAY DIRT

COLUMNS

80 KITS AND PIECES
Restomod with a difference

88 MOTORMAN
Miles magic

94 MOTOR SPORT FLASHBACK
Funny cars at The Brickyard

102 MARKETPLACE REPORT
Quirky and British

110 PRICE ON ...
Rubbish in and rubbish out

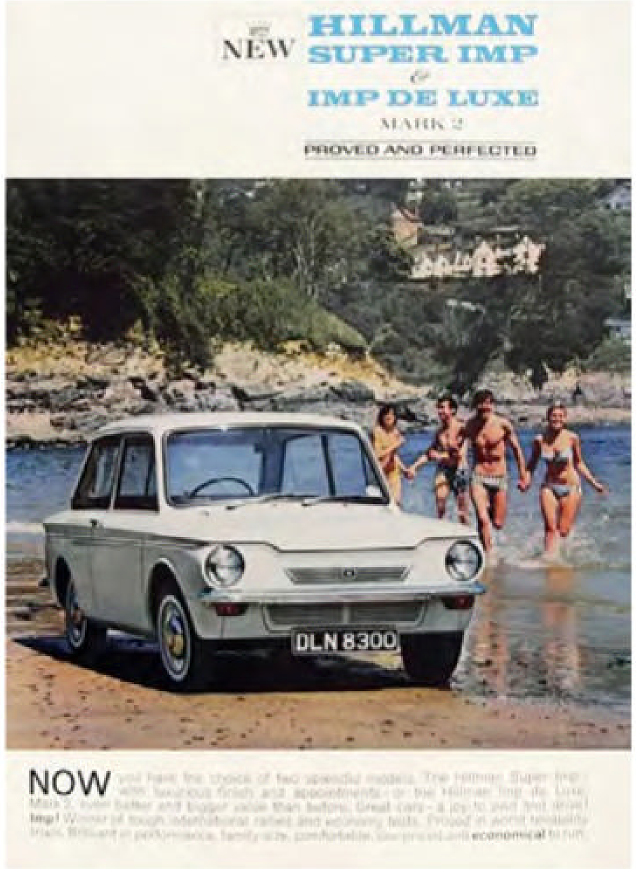
REGULARS

66 SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
106 COACHING FROM THE BENCH
111 BOOK REVIEW
112 BEHIND THE GARAGE DOOR
114 NATIONAL EVENTS
126 LOCAL SPECIALISTS
128 DAILY DRIVER
128 NEXT ISSUE

IMPERFECT INNOVATION

The rather staid Rootes Group decided that it had better build a better small car and came up with a design featuring innovation, practicality, and style that still stands out today

By Quinton Taylor; photography by Quinton Taylor, *New Zealand Classic Car* archives



NEW **HILLMAN SUPER IMP** & **IMP DE LUXE**
MARK 2
PROVED AND PERFECTED

NOW

The Rootes Group's Imp, offered first as a Hillman, represented economical motoring for four adults in a comfortable and lively package. It was just the ticket when fuel-supply issues resulting from the 1956 Suez oil crisis forced motorists to look for cheaper, more fuel-efficient transport. It deserved to succeed but, as a wholly new design, it suffered from underdevelopment, and poorly managed production issues. It was also made by a workforce unused to the demands of a car industry, and industrial troubles hugely affected its success.

THE SLUG

After the Suez Crisis, Rootes Group planners realised that there was an urgent need for smaller fuel-efficient cars in its then–mainly medium and large car line-up. Britain's fuel supply was cut by 20 per cent during the crisis, creating a strong demand for cars in the 1000cc class. Bubble cars proliferated almost overnight. Without a small car since the 1930s, Rootes deemed the market ripe for something with more finesse.

Rootes appointed a young Michael Parkes, later an engineer and Formula 1 and sports car racing driver for Ferrari, as project engineer and Tim Fry as coordinating engineer to develop a design that would deliver 60mph (100kph) and 60mpg, while accommodating two adults and two children. The result, 'The Slug', powered by a rear-mounted Villiers flat-twin engine, was unenthusiastically received by Rootes Group's board. It was deemed to be too much of a bubble car. Lord Rootes even refused to set foot in it. The board, to its credit, demanded something more competitive with Austin's A35 and Ford's Popular and Prefect models. BMC's clever Mini was also entering the fray. It reached the market some four years before the Imp's launch in May 1963.

PROJECT APEX

Peter Ware was appointed technical director to head the so-called Apex project at Rootes Group's base in Ryton, near Coventry. Now that the aim was to come up with something more advanced, an approach was made to specialist racing-engine builder Coventry Climax to see if its FWMA all-aluminium racing engine would fit the Apex rear engine bay.

Below: Styling influenced by Chevrolet's Corvair evident in the front-end layout

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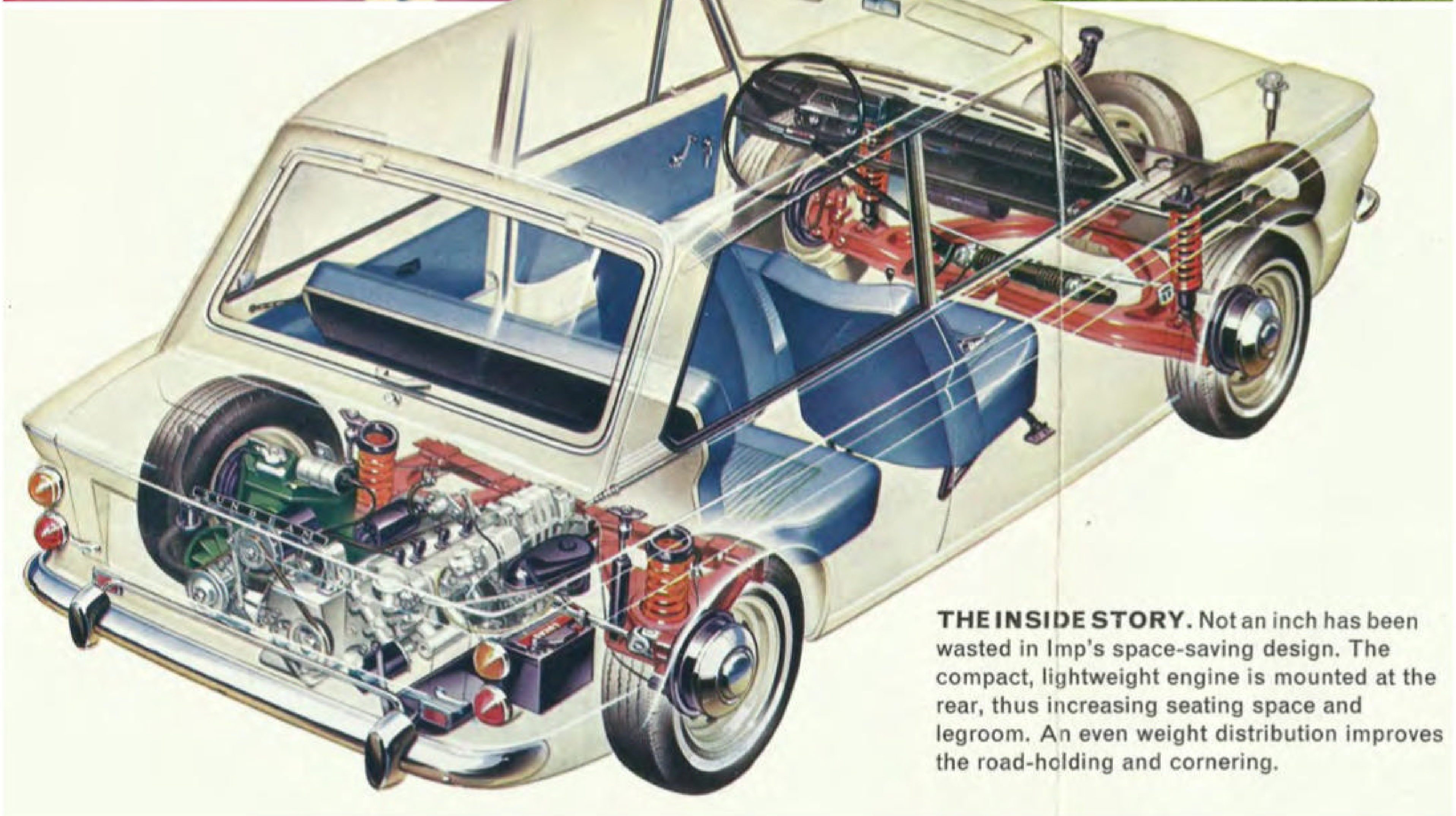
Mike Parkes: Engineer and F1 driver for Ferrari

Before the Imp came 'The Slug'



THE INSIDE STORY. Not an inch has been wasted in Imp's space-saving design. The compact, lightweight engine is mounted at the rear, thus increasing seating space and legroom. An even weight distribution improves the road-holding and cornering.

If you have ever driven one of these little cars with enthusiasm, then you will immediately understand how jewel-like that little 875cc engine is, humming away behind your shoulder, punching way above its weight. It loves to rev. I owned a modified 1968 Mark II for a few years in Christchurch and a delightful experience it was. It was also totally reliable, despite the Imp's reputation.

Timing, they say, is everything and working for Coventry Climax at this time was talented polish engineer Leo Kuźmicki. He joined the Royal Air Force during World War II after escaping the Russian invasion of Poland. A very competent motorcycle racer for Norton, Leo was instrumental in solving engine and valvetrain reliability problems in Norton's 1950s 500cc single Manx Norton engines.

He was also hand-picked by Norton director Tony Vandervell to design his successful Vanwall F1, 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine, which was fitted into a new chassis designed by a young Colin Chapman. It consisted of four Norton 500cc cylinders mounted on a former Rolls-Royce military engine block. It powered the British racing green machines to success in the inaugural F1 Constructors' Championship title in 1958, in which driver Stirling Moss missed the World Drivers' Championship by a single point to Ferrari's Mike Hawthorn. →

The board, to its credit, demanded something more competitive with Austin's A35 and Ford's Popular and Prefect models

First hatchback: opening back window solves parcel access

RE-ENGINEERING A RACE ENGINE

With Project Apex up and running, Kuźmicki moved to work at Rootes Group. He redesigned and detuned the Climax engine to make it more reliable for road use. He retained many Climax features while adding a revised cylinder head. The all-alloy engine, a first in British production cars, was installed at an angle of 45 degrees onto the rear transaxle. That kept the centre of gravity low and created a handy low rear shelf accessed by an opening rear window. It was effectively Britain's first hatchback.

The rear-engine design meant Rootes also had to invest in a more expensive trailing-arm suspension to counter oversteer common to this layout. The story goes that Rootes engineers had an example of Chevrolet's Corvair and wanted to avoid its rear swing-axle problems. No surprises either in where the styling for the Imp originated.

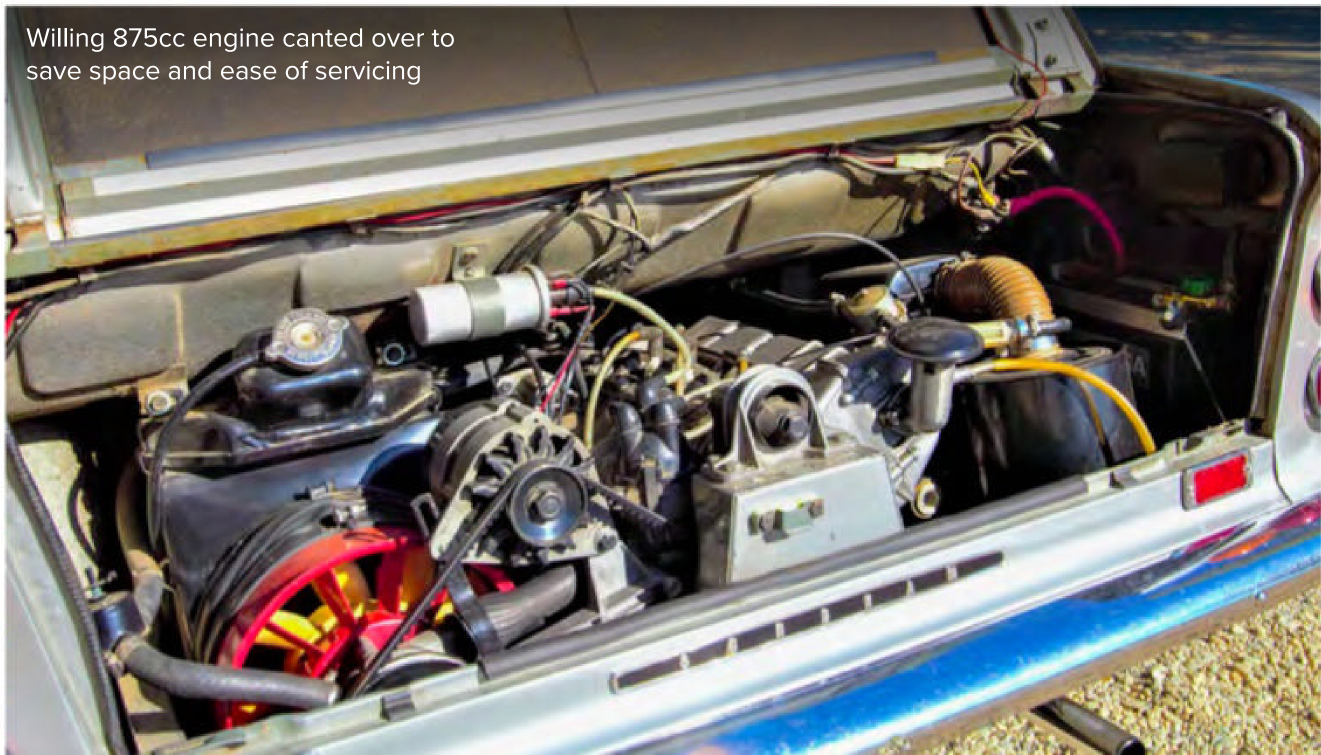
The Apex project came at a huge cost to Rootes. It failed to gain permission to expand its Ryton plant, and to obtain government grants it was encouraged to build a new plant at Linwood near Glasgow to help stave off the effects of a declining ship-building industry. Imp build quality initially suffered and industrial action plagued the industry. Rootes also had to contribute to a new Pressed Steel Company plant which would make the Imp's panels.

> The rear-engine design meant Rootes also had to invest in a more expensive trailing-arm suspension to counter oversteer common to this layout

That meant a round trip by rail of 480km, sending castings to Ryton for machining, returning to Linwood for assembly. This arrangement lasted for the duration of the Imp's production, and this, together with other problems, meant that just 50,000 Imps left the factory in1964 instead of the expected 150,000. Mechanical issues beset the underdeveloped car and, despite a major revision with the Mark II model in 1966, it never really recovered, its reputation hampered by owners' lack of knowledge about the alloy engine's particular requirements and the need to keep the dirt-splashed rear-mounted radiator clean.

To bolster sales, new models abounded, including a commercial van with a Commer badge, estate versions, an attractive coupé version, along with uprated engine modifications and revised interiors and controls in 1968. Cheap to run and well priced with steady sales, the Imp never rose to the popularity enjoyed by the Mini, though it too was a slow initial seller. In New Zealand, by the time the Mark III complete knock-down (CKD) version arrived, all Imps were badged as Sunbeams. In reality, the Kiwi versions were really the Singer Chamois version in its home market. In 1976, Chrysler toyed with the similar-shaped Simca 1000, using Imp mechanicals as a replacement, but it was a company in financial crisis and the model never evolved. The Sunbeam Car Club of New Zealand has a register catering to Imps. →

Fuel filler to the right and brake fluid to the left with good space for luggage



Willing 875cc engine canted over to save space and ease of servicing

30.04.23

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Lot 2, 1985 Lotus Excel
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EST . $50,000 - $60,000

Lot 43, 1970 Jaguar E-Type Series II 2+2 Fixed Head Coupe 4.2
EST . $230,000 - $260,000

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LIVE AUCTION
Sunday 30 April 2.30pm

The Sunbeam Imp is surprisingly capable over hills

With one of the better gear changes and light controls, Imps were renowned as easy little cars to drive in all conditions

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Our featured Sunbeam Imp is a survivor that is now in Gore in the care of Russell and Marlene Newland. A member of the Gore Vintage Car Club (GVCC), Russell bought their car from fellow member Bill Sheddan in 2021. A keen collector of all things Sunbeam, Bill purchased the little gem from retired Christchurch aircraft engineer Robert Tudehope in 2009. Restored by Robert, the Sunbeam is a 1970 Mark II model now being brought back to top condition, as Russell explains: "Gore Vintage Car Club member Bill Sheddan owned it and I saw he had it advertised on Trade Me and I thought I recognised the car. I rang Bill and we bought it, back in 2021. At the time, we didn't know what we were going to get but we were looking for something a bit smaller than our MGB and we wanted something to fit in the garage here."

In Bill's ownership, it won a People's Choice award at the 2010 GVCC Festival Rally. Bill took the car to the 2014 Sunbeam National AGM in Gisborne where judges gave it a good score. Bill went on to display the car at the Napier Art Deco Rally and Whangamatā Beach Hop that year.

Russell is pleased with his decision to buy the Imp, not only for the ease in which it can be driven but also because of the top prices now being asked for Imps, such as a recent 1970 Sunbeam Imp advertised on Trade Me for $35K.

"Imp prices are going up," he says. "Marlene has driven it and that was the idea — to do club runs and the club's ladies' run. She hasn't driven it much but she likes it. It's got lovely steering and the view — you sit in it and you can see all around you. And there is plenty of leg and headroom too."

FETTLING

Russell recently overhauled the water pump, as these have a reputation for trouble since they get a hard time from the large-ducted radiator fan. It was a wise move, as one of two bearings was very rusty. The tiny clutch in these cars was also replaced with the correct diaphragm type. The fork type initially sent to Bill proved very heavy in operation.

"We've been to Invercargill and as far as Te Anau. We drove it up to Five Rivers and Kingston and we went down to Curio Bay and along the east coast to Fortrose," says Russell. "It's no problem at all on the open road. It just sits on the road like glue and when you come to a tight corner it gets around it with ease. It keeps up with all the modern traffic too. Most of the road use we give it is through the car club, so we are not flat out — just cruising along at 80–90kph, although it does

HILLMAN IMP
DE LUXE SALOON

The Duke of Edinburgh admiring the new Hillman Imp De Luxe saloon at Rootes in Linwood, 1963

Rootes factory, Linwood, March 1969

go faster. It's fast enough for me and it's cheap on fuel with only an 875cc engine. Surprisingly, it seems to like the hills, getting up them easily."

With one of the better gear changes and light controls, Imps were renowned as easy little cars to drive in all conditions.

"Everything has been done; suspension, brakes and the engine has been re-built," says Russell. "In fact, all the mechanical stuff is good. I've seen some of these conversions such as disc brakes but then it's not original. I'm not a fast driver and I want to keep it original and the drum brakes are fine."

There are two jobs to complete the car to a standard at which he would like it: "The left door is not quite right in its mounting hinge adjustment. My nephew is a panel beater and is going to realign the door and tidy it up. Brad is good at that and he did the MG for us. I'm also going to replace the carpets, as they were mentioned in a note from the judges in 2014 as needing replacement; otherwise, the interior upholstery and headlining is all good. I worked with Imps some years back when I was with Wright Stephensons [stock agents and car dealers] and I remember the main thing the →

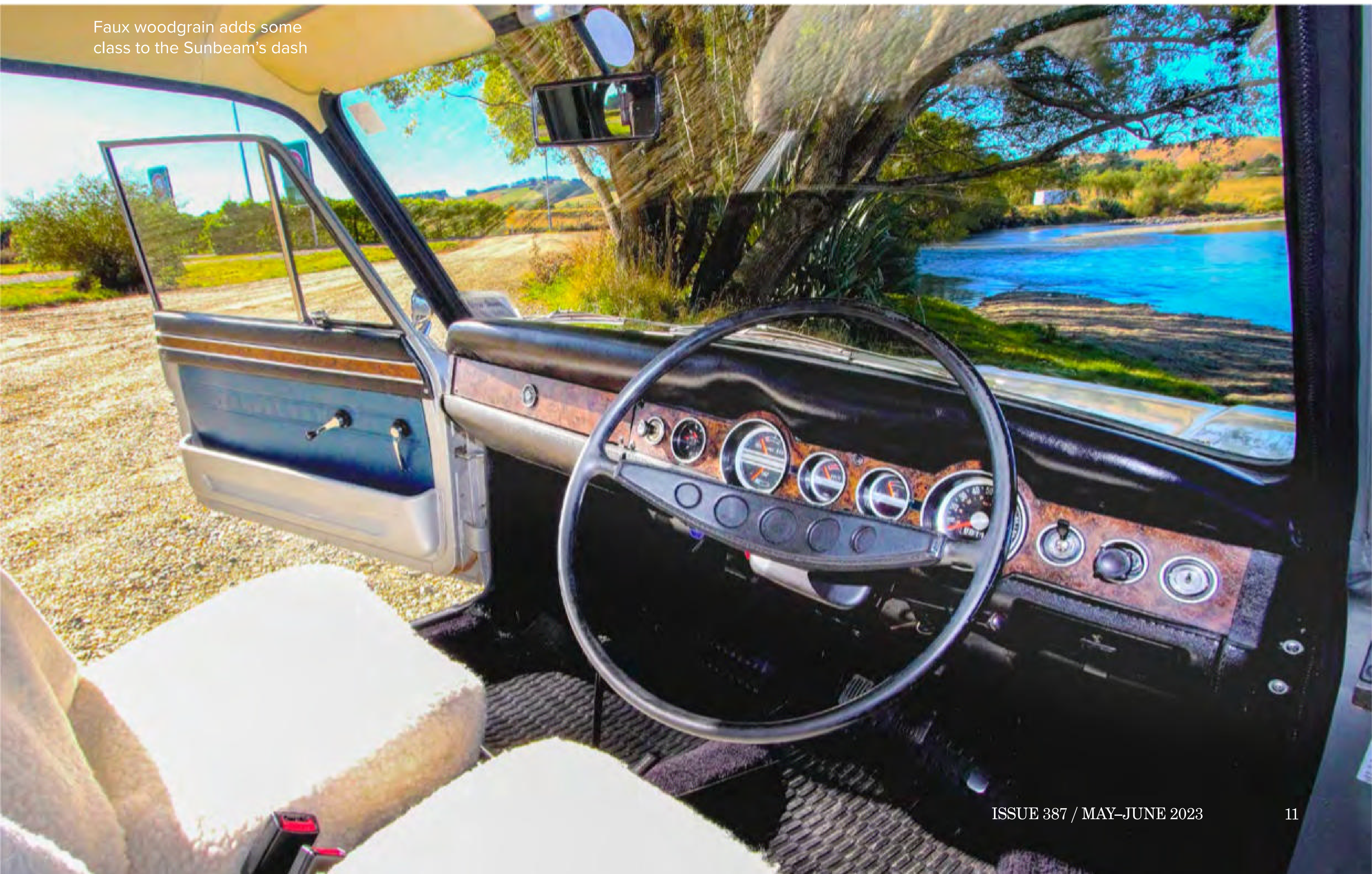
In 1967, Chrysler stepped in to take over the Rootes Group as part of Chrysler Europe

POLICE
LKV 105F

The Hillman Imp was also used by the Coventry police force in the 1960s

OAP 760R
777P
VYS 192

Chrysler produced the Hillman Imp at the Linwood plant, which closed for good in 1981



Faux woodgrain adds some class to the Sunbeam's dash

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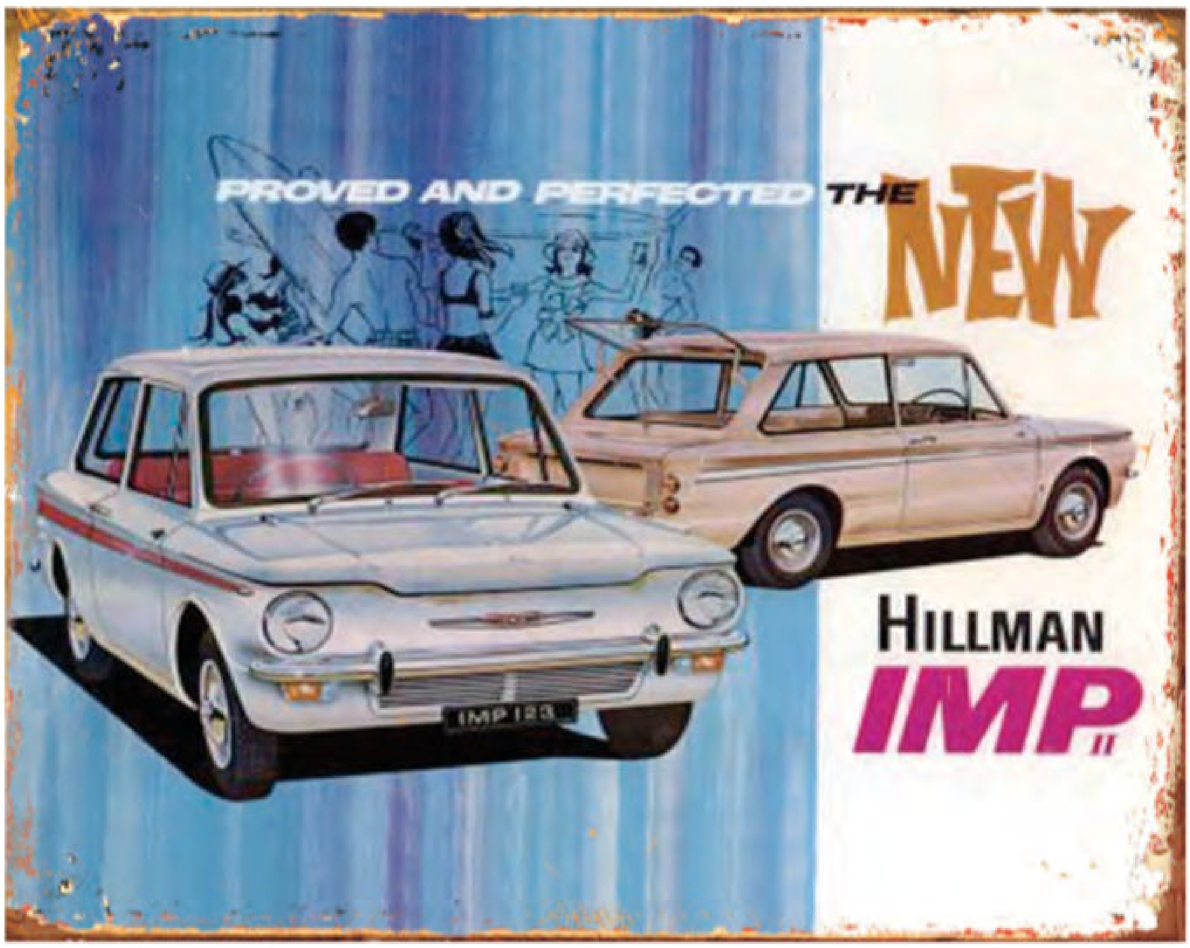
JLC 148D
HILLMAN ROOTES

mechanics complained about doing was setting the tappet bucket shims. We are looking forward to driving the Imp many more times."

A brief drive in Russell and Marlene's Imp not only brings back memories but shows just how capable these little cars are, once sorted. This example is one of the best, with not a rattle or squeak, and it rides very smoothly accompanied by that familiar Imp engine noise.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

It wasn't all about Imps, as Rootes engineers saw the potential in the potent 998cc version of their drivetrain. In 1967, Chrysler stepped in to take over the Rootes Group as part of Chrysler Europe. Lord Rootes initiated a partnership with the group in 1964 that failed. A brilliant project was planned using the Imp's mechanical components in a pretty sports car designed by Tim Fry and code named the 'Asp'. Discussions with Jensen Motors to build it looked at a capacity of 500 per week. Specialist North London body-maker Williams & Pritchard came up with a set of moulds so that the car could be made in fibreglass instead of steel. The same perimeter frame for the Asp could be used for a forward-control people carrier, the


PROVED AND PERFECTED THE NEW
HILLMAN
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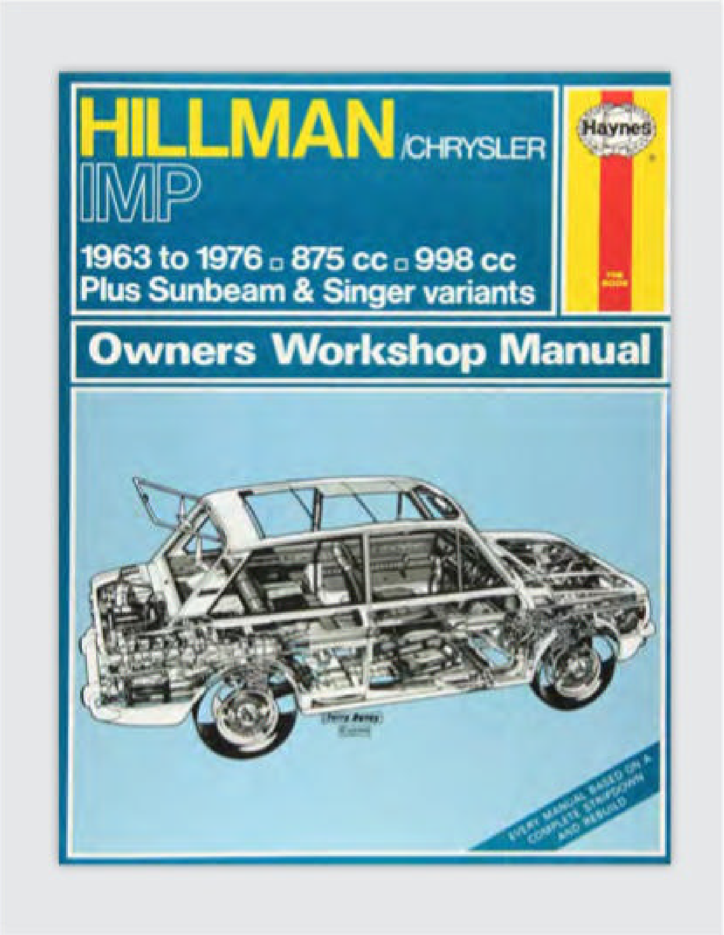
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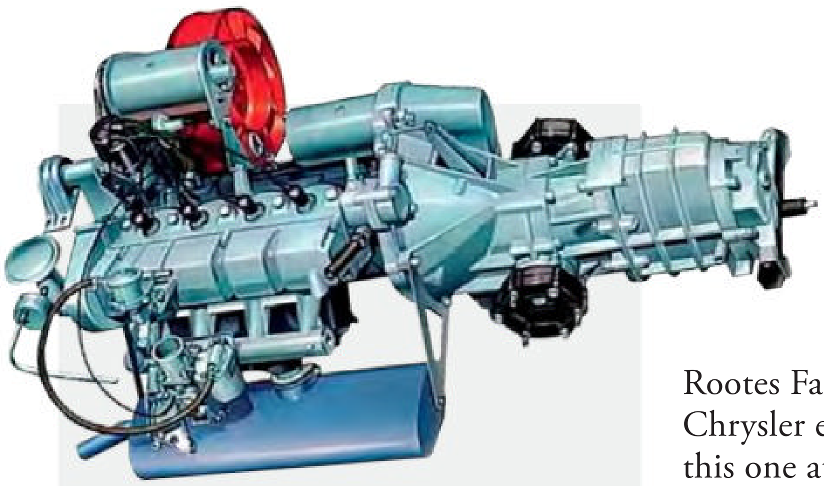


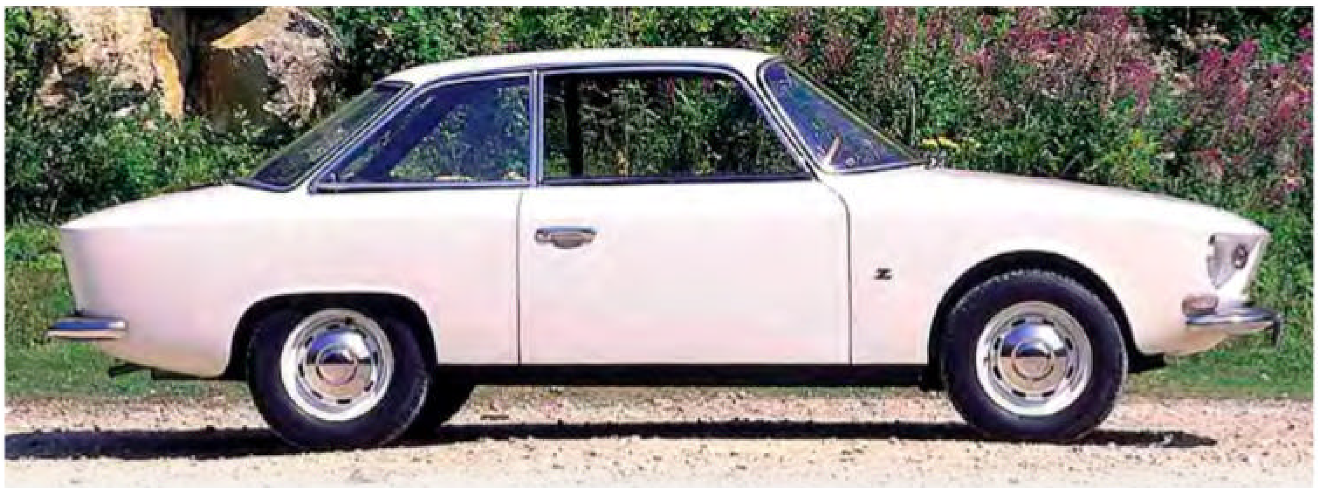
1970 SUNBEAM IMP MARK II

Engine	In-line four-cylinder, all-alloy block, rear-mounted
Capacity	Originally 875cc from 1963 in the Mark I, a revised Mark II version in 1965 featured larger valves and a straight-edge block casting. A 998cc version was available, plus a later, stronger Sunbeam-Talbot 930cc alloy block
Bore/Stroke	68.0mm/60.4mm (72.5mm/60.4mm for the 998cc)
Valves	two per cylinder, single-overhead camshaft
Comp. ratio	10:1
Max. power	37bhp (27.6kW) at 4500rpm
Max. torque	67Nm at 2600rpm
Transmission	Four-speed all-synchromesh transaxle
Suspension, F/R	Pressed-steel lower A-swing arm with shock absorbers and coil springs / Trailing pressed-steel arm, coils and shock absorbers
Brakes, F/R	Drum/Drum
Steering	Rack-and-pinion
Wheels	12x4½-inch rims, 155SR12 tyres (radials)
Dimensions	
Length	3581mm
Width	1524mm
Track, F/R	1282mm/1232mm
Wheelbase	2083mm
Weight	725kg
Performance	
Max. speed	129kph
0–100kph	21.2 seconds
Standing quarter-mile	21.5 seconds
Models	1963: Hillman Imp introduced; 1964: Singer Chamois; 1965: Commer Imp Van; 1966: Sunbeam/Singer Imp Sport; 1967: Hillman Californian, Singer Chamois Coupe, Hillman Husky Estate, Sunbeam Stiletto; 1968: Commer Imp Van renamed Hillman Imp Van; 1970: Singer, Husky, and Van models phased out; 1976: Hillman and Sunbeam models phased out
Production	1964–1976: Linwood Scotland and Ryton Coventry, UK. CKD assembled in Australia, Costa Rica, Ireland, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, South Africa, Uruguay, and Venezuela

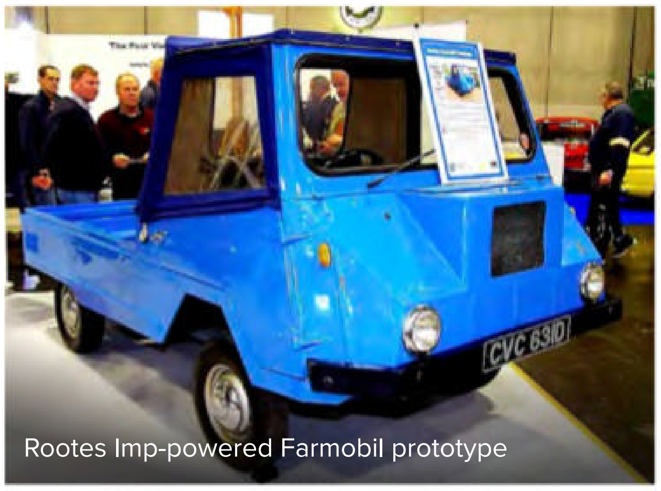
Rootes Farmobil, or a light van. Detroit Chrysler executives dropped the ball on this one at a time when MG / Austin-Healey was selling every Midget/Sprite it could make and MGBs and Triumph TR5s and Spitfires were heading stateside as if on migration. In the end, Imp racer Alan Fraser Engineering purchased the Asp from Rootes. It may still survive. A host of UK small car builders such as Ginetta and Davrian used the Imp drive unit. Italian styling house Zagato built a handful of special bodied 'Zimps'.

APPRECIATING IMPS

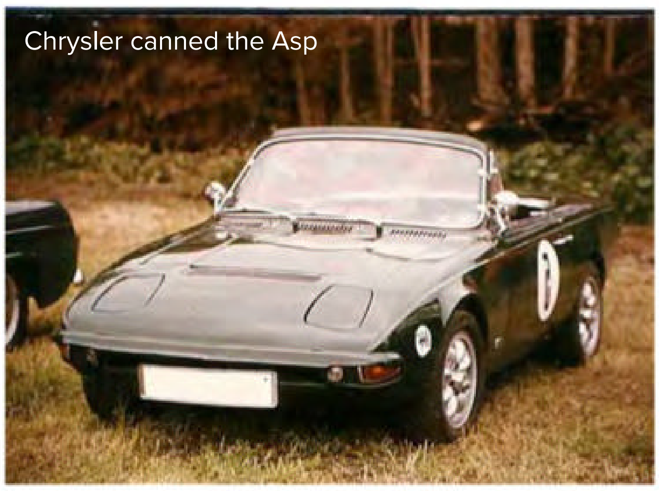
Imps are undergoing a renaissance in the UK where they were successfully raced and rallied in their heyday, and it is an emerging trend in New Zealand. Assembled here by Todd Motors, there is currently a surprising number under restoration. Motor racing saw Jim Richards setting the pace in the Sidchrome Imp, currently in the hands of Tony Mann in Dunedin. Tony races an Alan Fraser–tribute Imp, built by Gary Rush. It shares his garage with →



Just a handful of the pretty Zagato-bodied Imps (Zimps) were made



Rootes Imp-powered Farmobil prototype



Chrysler canned the Asp

Ian Perry racing his Sunbeam Stiletto at Timaru International Motor Raceway. Built by Brian Bradshaw, the car featured in the April 2000 of *New Zealand Classic Car* (Issue No. 112)

KUMHO TYRE
98
27
BROWNIE 69

Rosemary Smith racing her Imp Sunbeam in the 1966 Monte Carlo Rally

ROOTES
COMPETITIONS DEPARTMENT
EDU 710C
9

Rally driver Rosemary Smith became the face of the Imp

> Imps are undergoing a renaissance in the UK where they were successfully raced and rallied in their heyday, and it is an emerging trend in New Zealand

the ex–Roy Harrington racing Imp, while Tony's other project is another yellow screamer that he started during lockdown, powered by a BMW K-series motorcycle engine pumping out 130bhp (97kW).

The late Brian Bradshaw and his Impwerks restoration business in Christchurch has also encouraged local Imp culture. *New Zealand Classic Car* covered his exploits with features on his flying Sunbeam Stiletto appropriately numbered '998'. In a 2000 interview, Brian estimated that the car had cost him $25K. It is now raced by fellow Christchurch enthusiast Ian Perry, who is also racing an Imp-powered Ginetta coupé.

In June last year (Issue No. 378), we featured 'The Bank Manager's Imp' in our Behind the Garage Door column. Graham Trotter purchased his Imp from a deceased estate and restored it. Without ownership papers, Graham has finally managed to get this car licensed and on the road for the first of many cruises.

If you are contemplating buying one of these little wonders then the parts supply is not too bad. Members on 'Nz Impers' Facebook site are regularly helping each other. Administrator / Register keeper Maurice Walters has recently restored his 1964 Hillman Imp. John Fayen purchased much of Brian Bradshaw's parts supply and, in Australia, a long-term supplier of Imp rubber parts and other bits, Frank Schoenberger, has a very rare Sunbeam Farm Imp, a model built in New Zealand from CKD packs by Todd Motors. The Imp Site is also a good source of information. Check out Ben Selby's market appraisal of the Imp range and values elsewhere in this issue. ■

Russell is thrilled with his Sunbeam Imp

Nz Impers Facebook page coordinator Maurice Walter's recently restored Imp

Australian Frank Schoenberger's Todd Motors Sunbeam Farm Imp

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By Terry Cobham, photography by Greg Vincent

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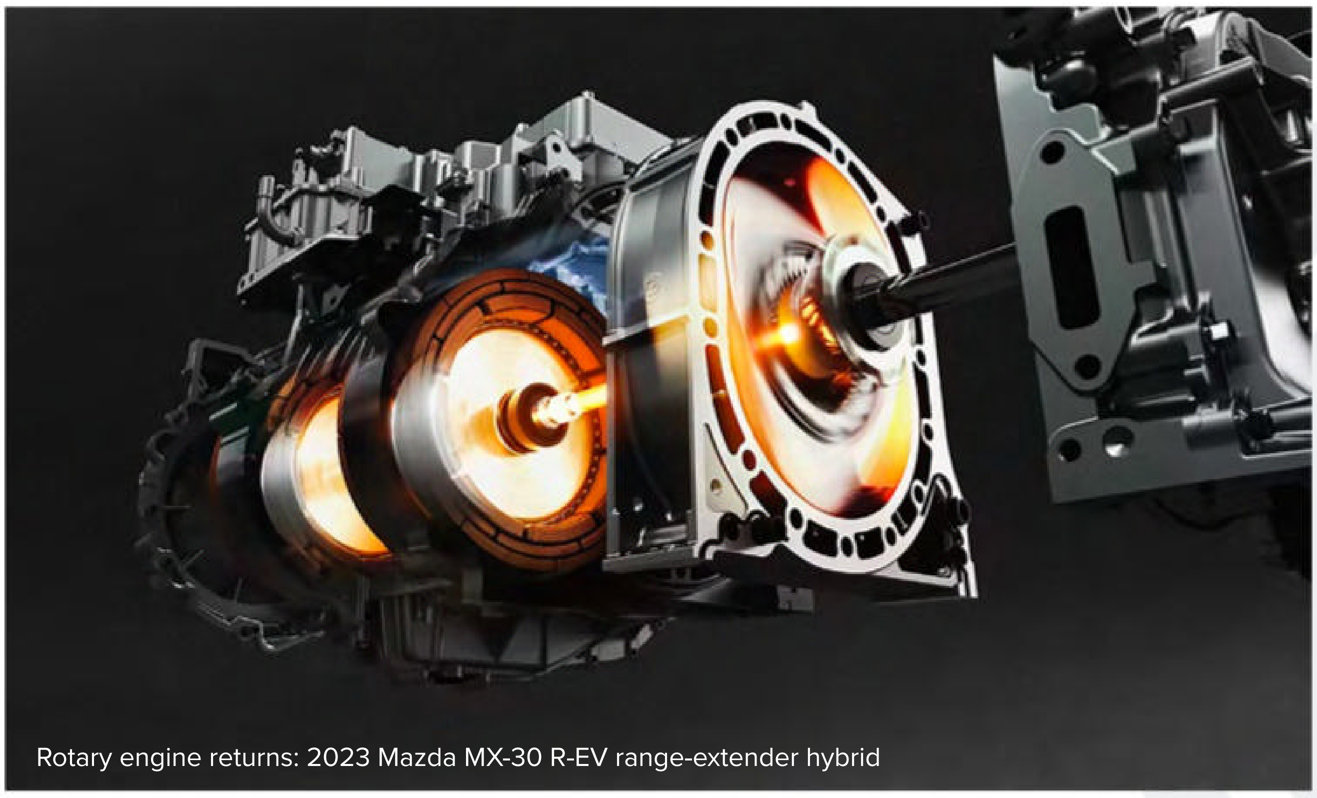
RE
DABUZZ



Rotary engine returns: 2023 Mazda MX-30 R-EV range-extender hybrid

> The rotary motor to date has been one of those engineering feats that has almost always delivered more promise than anything else

In 2023, Mazda plans to start selling a rotary-powered car again. Gone is its penchant for attaching this moniker to something sporty. Instead, Mazda plans to use a small rotary to augment the range of a new small SUV battery-powered vehicle. One end of the electric motor will contain a small single-rotor Wankel motor, to credit its inventor, that will drive the generator and thus extend the range from 100-plus kilometres to something like 600.

The rotary motor to date has been one of those engineering feats that has almost always delivered more promise than anything else.

HITLER'S PART IN THE ROTARY MOTOR

Self-taught German engineer Dr Felix Wankel came up with the idea of an engine that avoided pistons reciprocating in cylinders in about 1924. In his words, it was "a new type of engine, half turbine, half reciprocating. It is my invention". Wankel was a clerk at a printing works but obviously his mind was elsewhere. He was dirt poor — so poor, in fact, that he could not even afford to be an apprentice. This probably helped shape his political views as well, because he was also an extremely enthusiastic Nazi — so much so, that he had a major falling out with the leading Nazi in his area and was thrown in jail. That jail term only ended when Hitler himself intervened and had Wankel released. He then became an SS Stormtrooper and spent the war years engineering for Hitler.

After the war, the French jailed him for his Nazi activities but eventually he was released and restarted his efforts to create an engine that performed more efficiently and with less vibration than the normal reciprocating motors available.

Below: Fifty years ago, Mazda created this simple, very pretty, and lightweight coupé

MAZDA
DABUZZ
RE

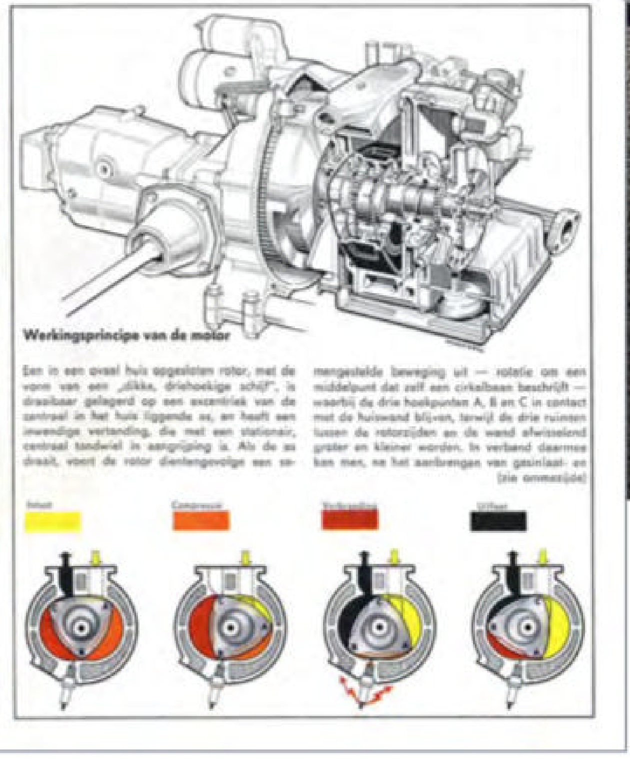
The underside mirrors the owner's same attention, care, and detail of the topside

AA
RE
DABUZZ

From an era when the rotary engine was full of promise, the Mazda design team came up with an appropriate design

Debate surrounds which vehicle manufacturer was first to develop a Wankel engine–powered car

The NSU Wankel Spider, 1964–'67



EARLY BEGINNINGS

He had patented his engine ideas as early as 1929. Post-war, and by 1957, he had manufactured prototypes and licensed his engine design, first to the Curtiss-Wright aircraft company in the US. Debate surrounds which vehicle manufacturer was first to develop a Wankel engine–powered car. It could have been NSU, with a Prinz model. Skoda claims that it was the first with its Wankel-powered 100MB. What is certain is that the first Wankel-engined production car was the 1964 NSU Spider. The tiny 500cc engine gave the tiny car a not-so-tiny top speed of 155kph. This certainly helped get the whole rotary-engine concept noticed. NSU eventually produced the ground-breaking — as well as engine-breaking — NSU Ro80. Sadly, the car failed but by now the rotary engine was stuttering towards a real life.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

In the following decade, various manufacturers dipped their toes in the water but most found it too fraught to continue. Mercedes, Ford, General Motors, and Citroën, as well as a handful of major motorcycle manufacturers all produced development models. Some managed to get some cars to market for a limited time. Citroën even set up a joint–but–eventually ill-fated engine-manufacturing division with NSU. Citroën produced two different Wankel-powered models, one based on the Ami and one on the GS. The second of those almost tipped Citroën into bankruptcy. Total sales of the two models scarcely broached 1000.

Ford was a part of a project that died at birth, a rotary-powered Mustang. General Motors did produce one Corvette that was rotary powered, and from 1975 until 1977, Holden sold a few HJ and HX Premier models to Mazda in Japan. They fitted the 1.3-litre versions of their rotary to these cars, endowing them with appalling acceleration and even worse economy stats. The sales statistics matched as well. →

MAZDA
S122A
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エンジン型式 ENGINE MODEL
12A
総排気量 DISPLACEMENT (ℓ)
ロータリエンジン ROTARY ENGINE
(0.573 x 2)
車台番号 CHASSIS NO
S122A
保安基準適合
7-1
(ONLY IN JAPAN)
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TOYO KOGYO CO., LTD.
MADE IN JAPAN

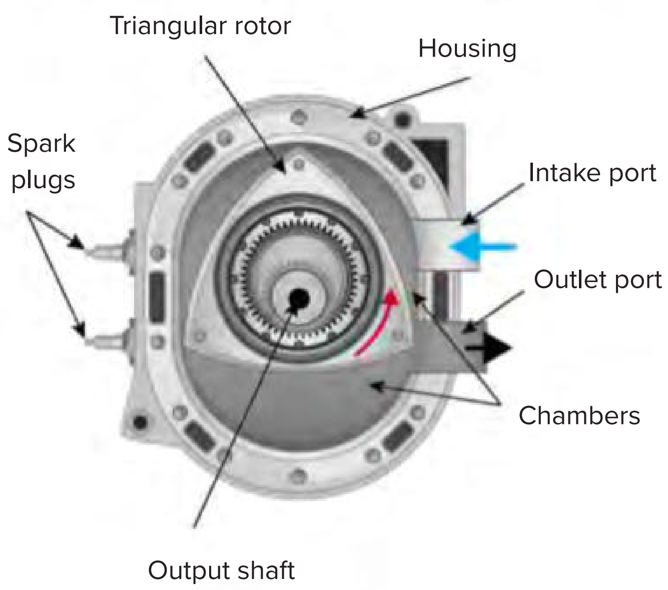
Capella
Coupé
Super
DELUXE
RE
RE

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED …

All was not lost for the Mazda rotary motors, though, as Mazda engineers had continued developing the various bits and pieces. A rotary motor consists of a piston that rotates rather than going up and down. The rotary piston is simply a triangle with the corners rounded off. This spins around a fixed gear inside the cylinder block in an elliptical orbit, sort of like a hula hoop going around a waist. Wankel was not a qualified engineer but he knew enough to be able to see what laws of physics and mathematics could be applied to his plans for his motor.

The rotor uses each of its three sides in one revolution. First, the piston passes the inlet port where the fuel is drawn directly into the motor — no valves, just an inlet port. The wall of the cylinder block is shaped to compress the air–fuel mixture against the rotor and two spark plugs fire not quite in sync. This propels the piston on to the next phase where the gases are ejected through an exhaust port, again without the aid of valves. A single-rotor motor has just two moving parts, the piston, or rotor, and the crankshaft, cleverly combining with the shape of the chamber to still manage the essential suck, squeeze, bang, blow. →

WANKEL ENGINE


Triangular rotor
Housing
Spark plugs
Intake port
Outlet port
Chambers
Output shaft

WLDGTO
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ADDING ROTORS

Mazda and others had added extra rotors to these motors and single-, double-, triple-, and even quad-rotor versions of these motors exist. Mercedes persevered with a triple-rotor version in its attempts to create a luxury sports car, even testing quad-rotor versions before dropping the project. Mazda did create a quad-rotor version and eventually won Le Mans with its now-famous 787 sports racing car.

The Mazda RX-2 or Capella featured here is a Japanese-assembled and New Zealand–new car. These models, probably only the four-door version, were also assembled at Motor Industries International at Ōtāhuhu in South Auckland. This car was sold new in 1972 so it is a 'series 1' version. Over the course of the model's life, Mazda introduced rolling changes but never really designated the cars with different series numbers. The series numbers are known but not denoted, and small changes like headlight and tail-light design, and bonnet shape are the easiest ways to recognise who's who in this particular zoo.

FIFTY-ONE YEARS LATER

Kelly Walden bought this car as a project 10 years ago when it had already languished in a container for more than a decade. The car was from the South Island originally. The rotary motor had been replaced by a regular four-pot 1600cc unit. Kelly acquired a rusting ruin and set about what has been a decade-long project for him. He has completed 90 per cent of the work himself, and this has included stripping the car back to bare metal before beginning a complete rebuild. Rusty panels were either repaired or ditched — mostly the latter. The only original panels are the two doors and the roof. Such care has been taken that the bonnet is the fifth he bought before he was satisfied.

Every mechanical part has been restored, rebuilt, or replaced. To look under the bonnet is to see what the car would have looked like as it rolled out of the Mazda plant in 1972 — well, almost. In this case, it looks better. Kelly has made some modifications that trainspotters will notice but essentially this is a restoration.

RX-2 RE COUPE (STANDARD RX-2)

Manufactured	Japan
Assembled	Various countries
Production	1972–1978
Engine	Mazda rotary
Capacity	1148cc
Cylinders	Two rotors
Comp. ratio	9.4:1
Fuel system	Four-barrel Nikki
Max. power	97kW at 7000rpm
Max. torque	156Nm at 4000rpm
Transmission	Four-speed manual
Suspension, F/R	McPherson-strut, coil springs / Four-link, coil springs
Steering	Recirculating-ball
Brakes, F/R	Disc/Disc
Dimensions	
Length	4160mm
Width	1580mm
Wheelbase	2470mm
Kerb weight	1010kg
Performance	
Max. speed	182kph
0–100kph	9.4 seconds
Standing quarter-mile	16.7 seconds

DABUZZ
RE
Super Deluxe

The engine bay is pristine and looks original, but it does hide some modernisation and performance enhancements

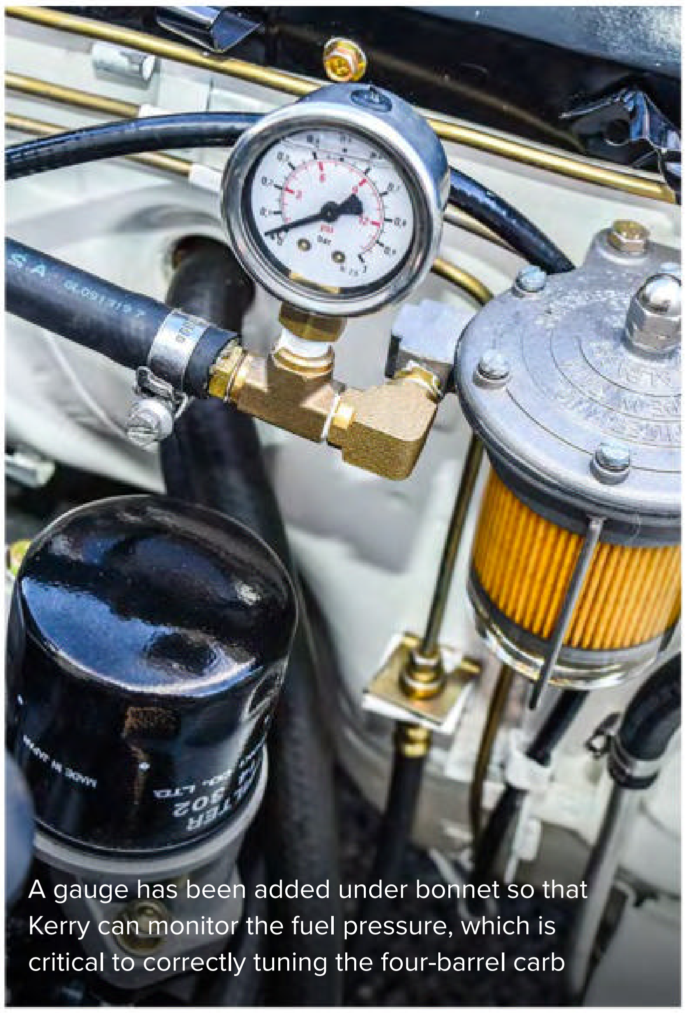
SMALL CHANGES

Every nut and bolt has been ‘passivated’, which means that it has been ‘decorated with a non-reactive coating’. In this case, zinc. Every piece of metal gleams like new and even if it isn’t original it looks like it. The original air filter — factory colour, of course — complete with new transfers, hides the non-standard 48mm four-barrel Weber carb that has replaced the original Nikki. The double distributors send an uprated spark to their respective spark plugs but hidden inside are new electronic packs that have replaced the points.

SOME NOT SO SMALL CHANGES

The mechanical bits and pieces go on like that. The original brakes are still there, just the pads are uprated. The whole car sits marginally closer to the ground now with both uprated springs and shocks. All rubber bushes have been replaced with Nolathane pieces, so the car is also tighter in that respect.

Coupe
MAZDA
DABUZZ
RE

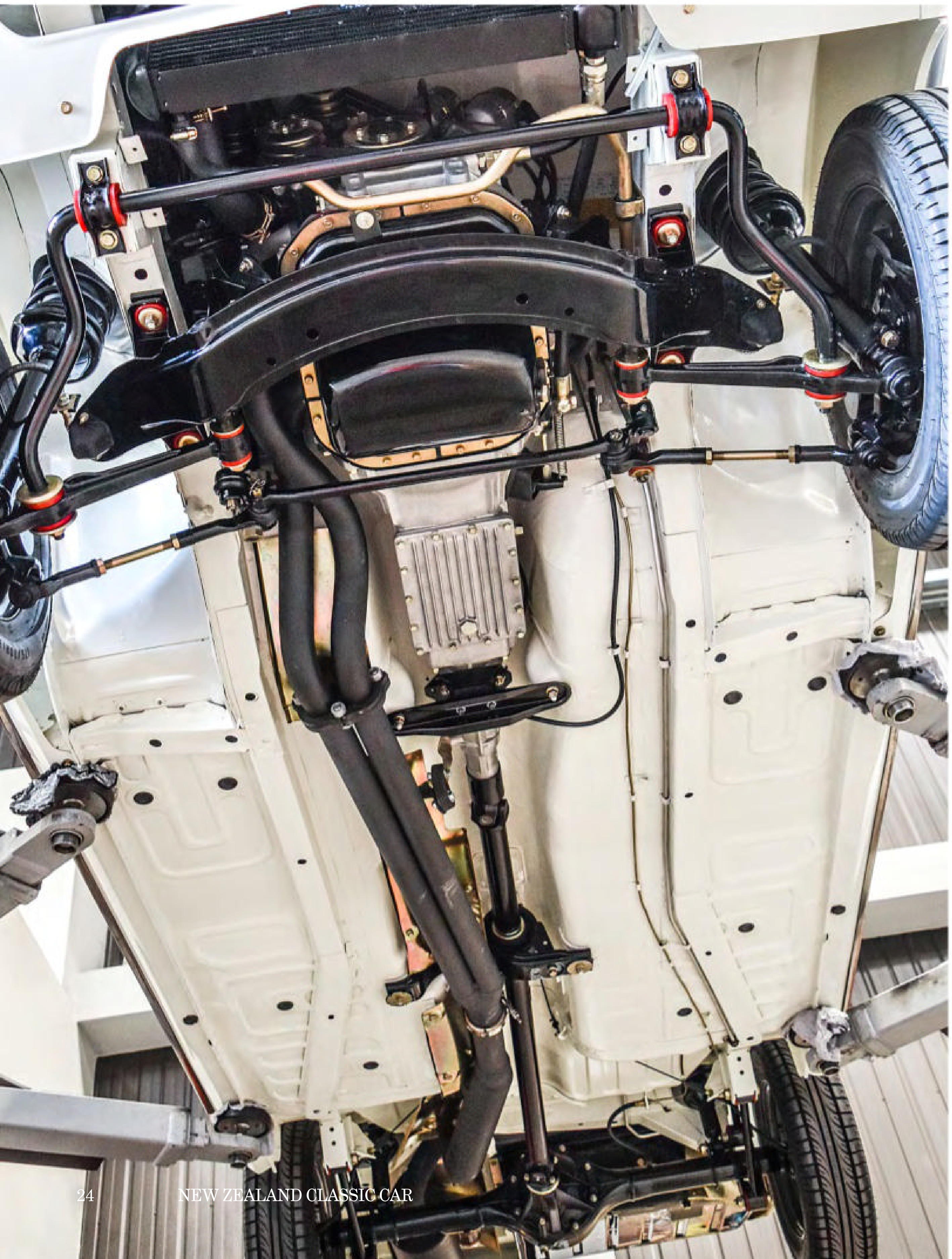

A gauge has been added under bonnet so that Kerry can monitor the fuel pressure, which is critical to correctly tuning the four-barrel carb

Driving Safety
Capella RE

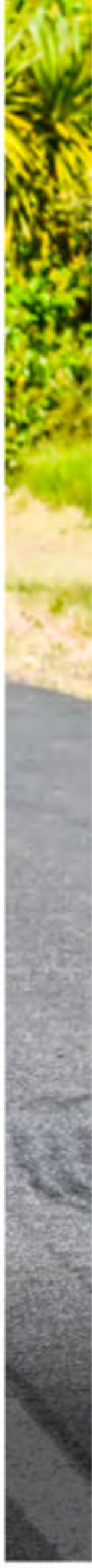
The motor, which is also mildly uprated, has lightened and balanced rotors, and smaller carbon apex seals. Those apex seals — the part that covers the rounded tip of each triangle section of the rotor at the point that it meets the combustion chamber wall — need to make a friction seal, and they are the parts that caused so many problems for early rotary owners. Some Citroën motors lasted less than a week before they were back for replacement seals. Kelly has also uprated the oil-pump capacity and oil flow around the motor, treating another area related to the unreliability issues these motors were known for.

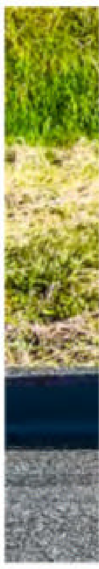
To assist with the motor's breathing, he has what is called a 'full-cut bridgeport'. In simple terms, this means that the holes in the inlet and exhaust chambers have been made so big that they have to have a bridge across them so those apex seals have something to support them as they run across these areas. Imagine what an orange sliced through the middle looks like and the bridge is there where the pith is. The orange itself is just a great big hole that the gases flow through.

The flywheel has also had metal cut away and the clutch is now a heavy-duty version. This means the free-revving motor can really do its screaming stuff. Kelly says that he still has tuning work to do on the motor but it already sounds better than any of those boy-racer rotaries that used to be a part of the Friday-night scene across the motu. →

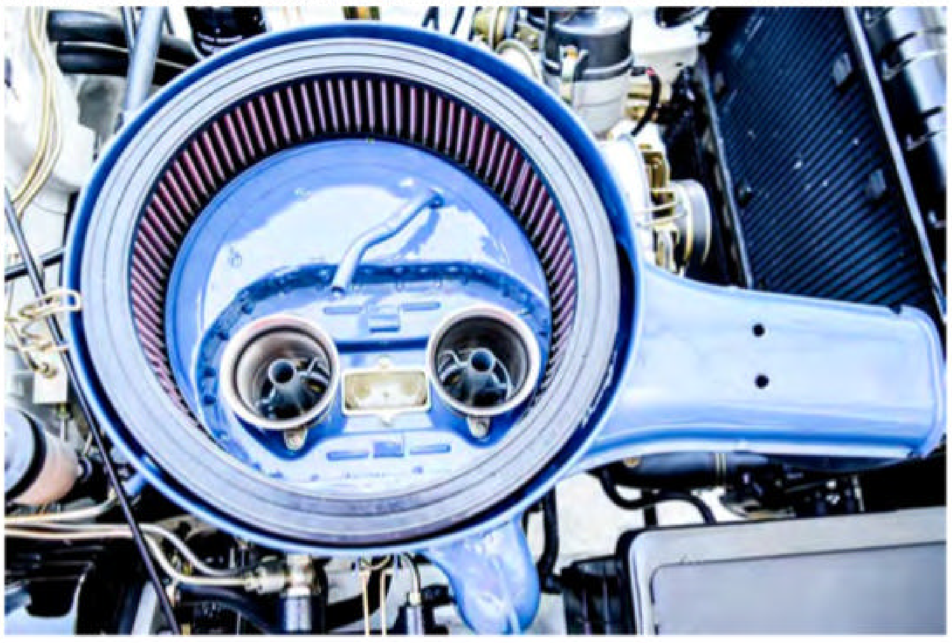


Left: The underside is as pristine as the rest of the car, with everything back to new condition





Owner Kerry Walden and 10 years' worth of restoration



1972 Japanese interior design, almost mid century, and at the moment nothing is as fashionable as that is again

A TOUCH OF THE ’70S

To sit in the car is to go back to the ’70s. It has an analogue dash, of course; switches that stick out from that dash; what looks like a too large and too skinny steering wheel; and the gear lever is just that, a lever. Then there is that noise — like tearing a sheet of calico and a gunfight at the OK Corral all at the same time. When it makes a noise like that, who cares what it handles like? But it really does feel tight and tied down, in a 1970s way, of course. An estimated 134kW, up from an original 97kW, really makes the car sit up — so much so that it will more than just chirp the tyres on an upshift. The motor will spin up to 8000rpm, and by reputation, depending on the bravery of the owner, it will keep climbing from there.

The car has been repainted Aurora White, an original Mazda colour. The interior is almost all brand new, with the seats, carpets, and dashboard all replaced or redone to new. Only the headlining is as it was, and that’s because it is in such good condition that Kelly wanted to keep as a nod to the car’s past. This little car looks better and goes better than new, and must now be one of only a very small handful of these pretty little pieces of 1970s car history remaining. ■

DABUZZ
Capella
RE

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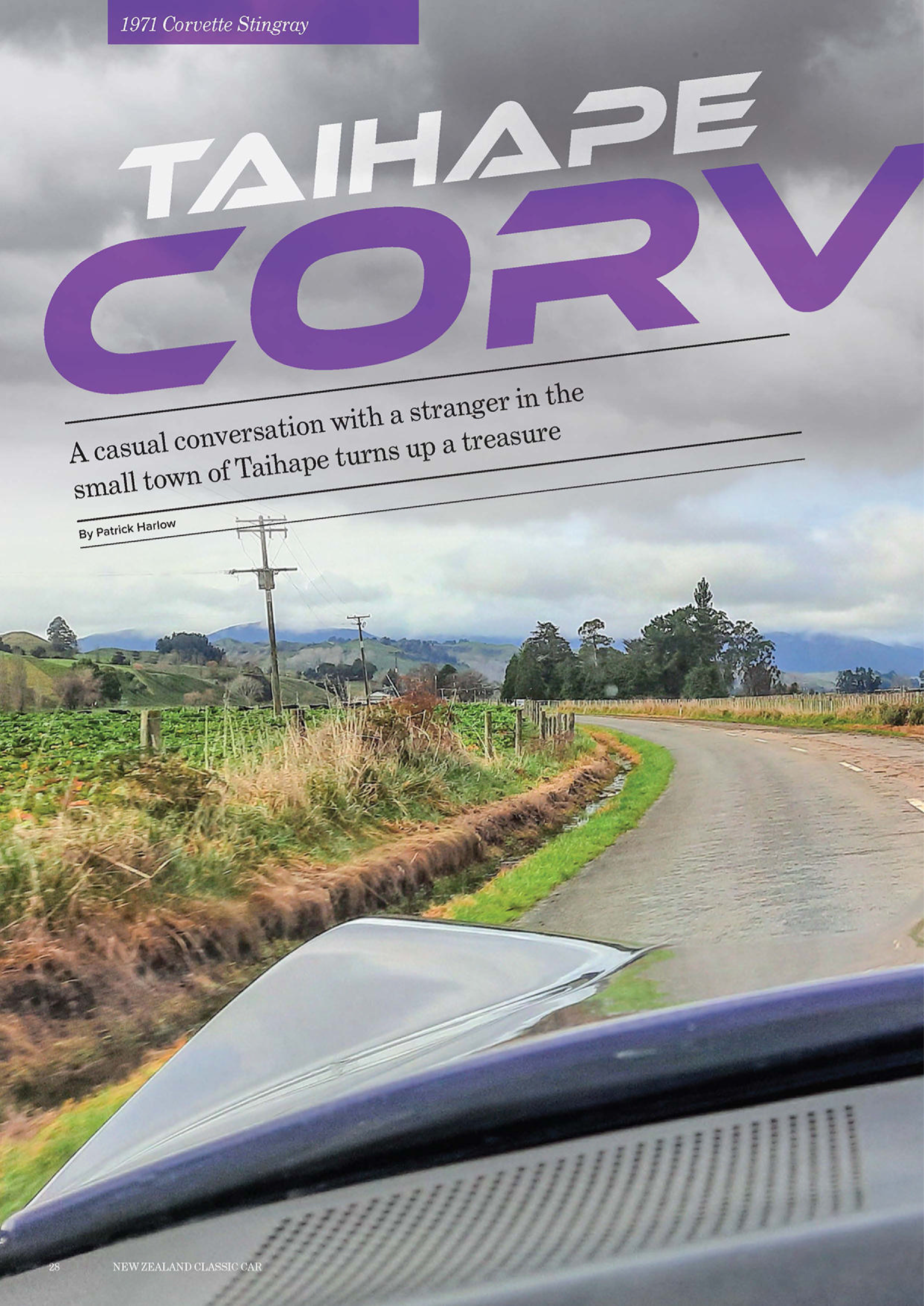
TAIHAPE CORV

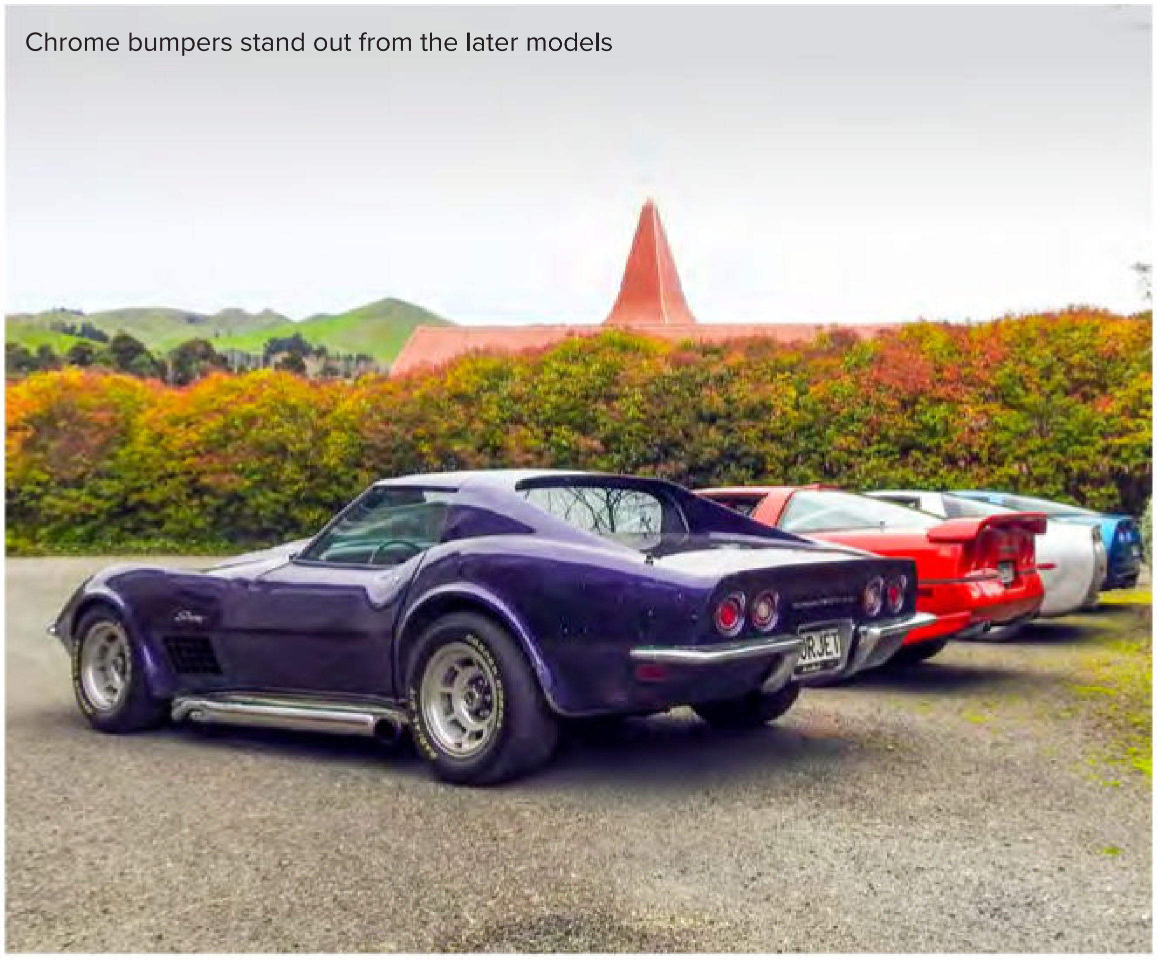
A casual conversation with a stranger in the small town of Taihape turns up a treasure

By Patrick Harlow



ETTE

Taihape is a little town about a quarter of the way up the North Island. It makes a convenient coffee stop for those driving north to Taupō or beyond. While some choose to power on through, I have stopped there many times. About three months ago, we stopped there again with friends, on our way to Taupō for a holiday. Unfortunately, I had parked the car in front of a dress shop, which immediately demanded investigation by our wives. My friend and I spent a few dutiful minutes in the shop prior to being evicted for somehow not having the right spirit of enquiry. Outside, we were considering how much damage might be done to our bank accounts when one of the locals pulled up to buy a pie at the local bakery and café. →



Chrome bumpers stand out from the later models

The egg-crate grille was standard on all '70–'72 C3 Corvettes

His car, an old Alfa Romeo, was thankfully interesting enough to distract me from the excited comments coming from within the shop that had started me wondering what dinner would actually be like at a soup kitchen. The car's owner was in no hurry, and as it appeared that we were going to be waiting outside the shop for a good while, he was happy to talk about his car. I am always looking for the next magazine story but had not expected to find a scoop in Taihape. But 'if you don't ask, you don't get', so I asked the owner of the Alfa Romeo, Jeff Wong — clearly some kind of car guy — if he had a hobby car besides his Alfa.

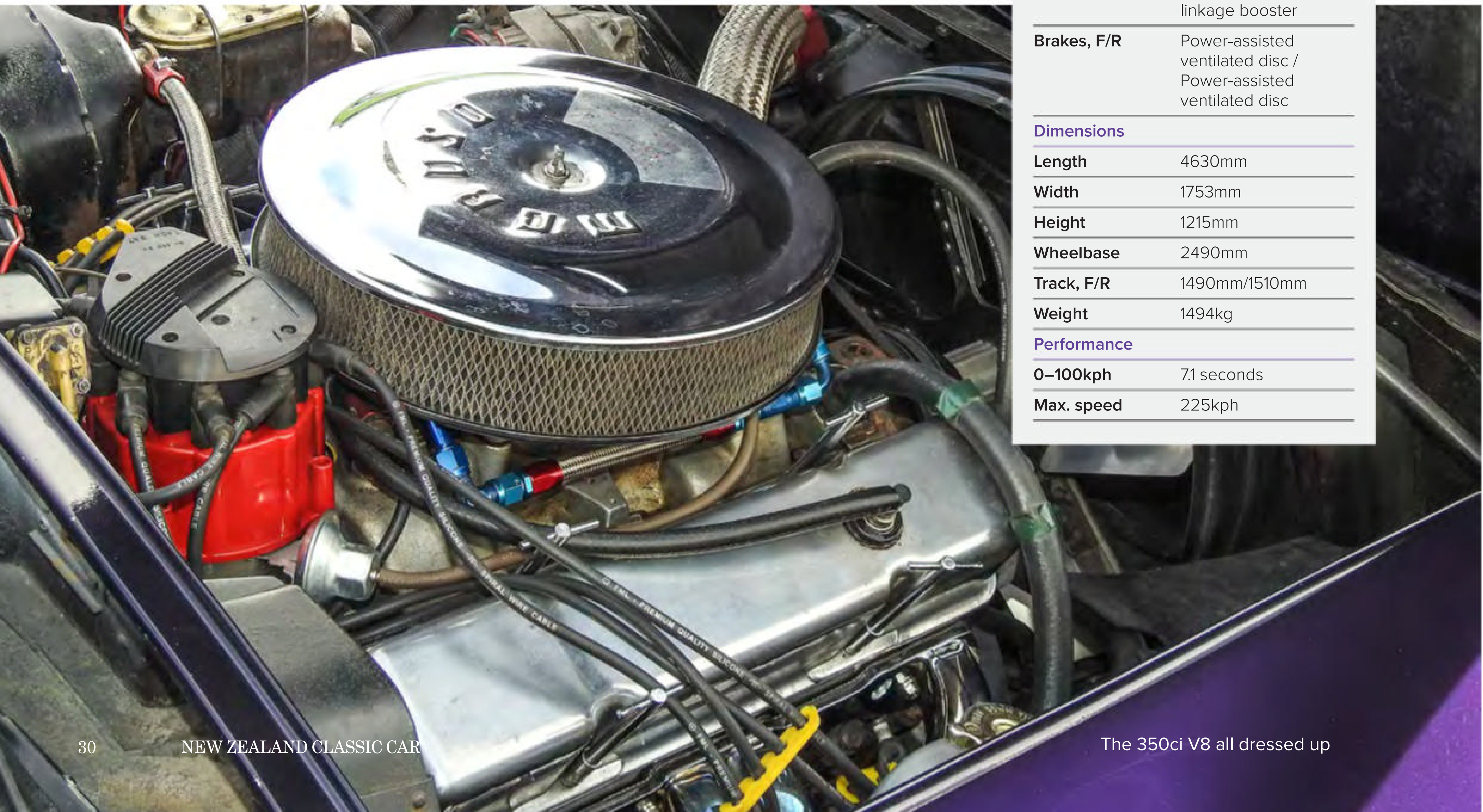
TREASURE TROVE

It turned out that he owned a '66 Shelby Mustang, a Ferrari 308 that he kept for racing, a Ferrari 430 that was his dream car, a W8 VW Passat, a beat-up Rover 75, and the Corvette featured here. It's the car he has owned the longest. My opinion of Taihape changed instantly. I only vaguely recall noticing my wife exiting the shop carrying several bags.

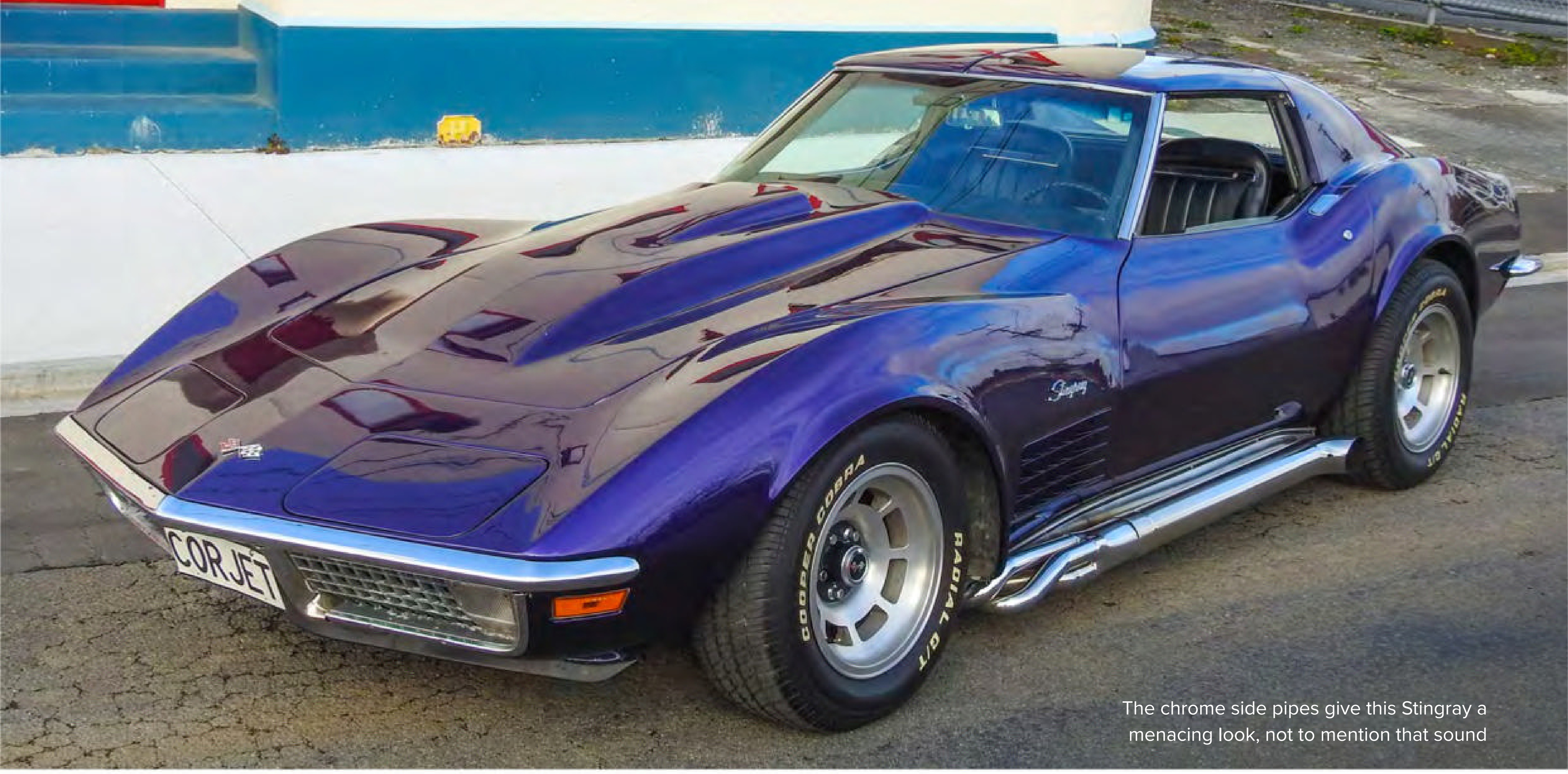
Three months later, I headed back to Taihape, by myself, having ascertained before leaving, and checking again in Levin, that my wife was not aboard, and not hiding in the boot.

1971 C3 CORVETTE

Engine	Chevrolet V8, upgraded to '70 LT1 specs
Capacity	5.7-litre
Bore/Stroke	102mm/88.5mm
Valves	16
Comp. rate	12.5:1
Max. power	270hp (201.3kW) at 4800rpm
Max. torque	490Nm at 3200rpm
Fuel system	750 Holley carburettor
Transmission	Four-speed manual, Hurst shifter
Suspension, F/R	Four-wheel independent; double-wishbone, coils / leaf-spring
Steering	Recirculating-ball with linkage booster
Brakes, F/R	Power-assisted ventilated disc / Power-assisted ventilated disc
Dimensions	
Length	4630mm
Width	1753mm
Height	1215mm
Wheelbase	2490mm
Track, F/R	1490mm/1510mm
Weight	1494kg
Performance	
0–100kph	7.1 seconds
Max. speed	225kph



The 350ci V8 all dressed up


The chrome side pipes give this Stingray a menacing look, not to mention that sound

CORJET
COOPER COBRA
RADIAL G/T
CORVETTE
The snug cockpit is totally functional

Jeff's Corvette may have been a couple of generations older than mine, but it was not slow

Jeff knew just about everybody in the small town by name. His father had owned a store in Taihape and Jeff had been born there. Many years ago now, Jeff had left Taihape to earn a few bob, after which he returned. He was now a member of the local council.

As I was early, I popped into one of the many cafés that littered the high street and found myself sitting next to a group of retired people who obviously met there regularly. They were having a conversation about how much better it was living in Taihape than in Waiouru, where they were based in their army days. Taihape had everything they needed. Admittedly, there was no longer a local car sales yard. Back in the good old days, they had a local Ford and Holden/Vauxhall/Bedford dealership. In the same town they also had separate dealerships for BMC/Triumph/Rover, Renault/Škoda, and Chrysler/Hillman/Mitsubishi. These days, if you wanted to buy a car, you had to travel to Palmerston North, 90 minutes or so down the road. As the time approached to go and meet Jeff, the conversation had shifted to the disgusting price of petrol.

SIDE BY SIDE

As a treat to myself, I had driven to Taihape in my C5 Corvette, and I thought it would be fun to look at →

The C3, C4, C5, C6 model line-up

the two cars side by side and maybe cruise some roads together. Jeff was keen and we soon found ourselves driving on what had been the old State Highway 1 before the government put the current road in. It was quite windy, with plenty of bends that could be driven at speeds that tested the Corvettes' handling. Jeff's Corvette may have been a couple of generations older than mine, but it was not slow.

Our last stop was the local working-men's club, a converted house that was, conveniently, right next to the Cascade Brewery. It was said that the disused brewery still stored enough beer to get the town through an apocalypse. Naturally, everybody inside the club knew Jeff, and I was introduced as 'the guy from that classic car magazine'. Not surprisingly, the story turned to cars, and I soon discovered that many of them owned classic cars too. Gathered at the club were owners of an HZ Monaro, a '65 Falcon, and even a couple of other blokes who owned Corvettes. Once they had assured me that Corvettes were not as common as taxis in Taihape — actually, they are much more common, as there are no taxis in Taihape — the conversation moved on to other things, such as my origins. In a reversal of the usual conversational trope, I discovered →

> Not surprisingly the story turned to cars and I soon discovered that many of them owned classic cars too

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Stingray
COOPER COBRA
RADIAL G/T

that the fact that I had been born in the South Island meant I was an immigrant and, even though I had lived in the North Island for 40 years, I was still 'fresh off the boat'.

That night was the working-men's club's big pool challenge, which was played for high stakes. After a couple of hours of relaxed but serious competition, Steve Cope, a Corvette C6 owner, was declared the winner, claiming the prize purse of a heady $10.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

The next day I met Jeff for the photo shoot outside the Cascade Brewery, a building that had been built in the art-deco era and, like a lot of the buildings in the town, had plenty of character. The photo shoot had to wait until after we had said hello and chatted to the gentleman who had been the rural postie since 1968. Only then was I able to get down to the serious business of taking photographs. Several interruptions later, courtesy of people walking or even driving by who had to stop for a chat, the job was eventually done.

COKE-BOTTLE CURVES

Every Corvette owner has a story. Jeff's starts with his father who used to occasionally buy magazines like *Autocar* (UK), *Road & Track* (US), *Motor Trend* (US), and *Wheels* (Aus.). As a boy, Jeff would look at the photos and sometimes read the words but kept coming back to a Corvette article that he had seen in the May 1969 issue of *Motor Trend*.

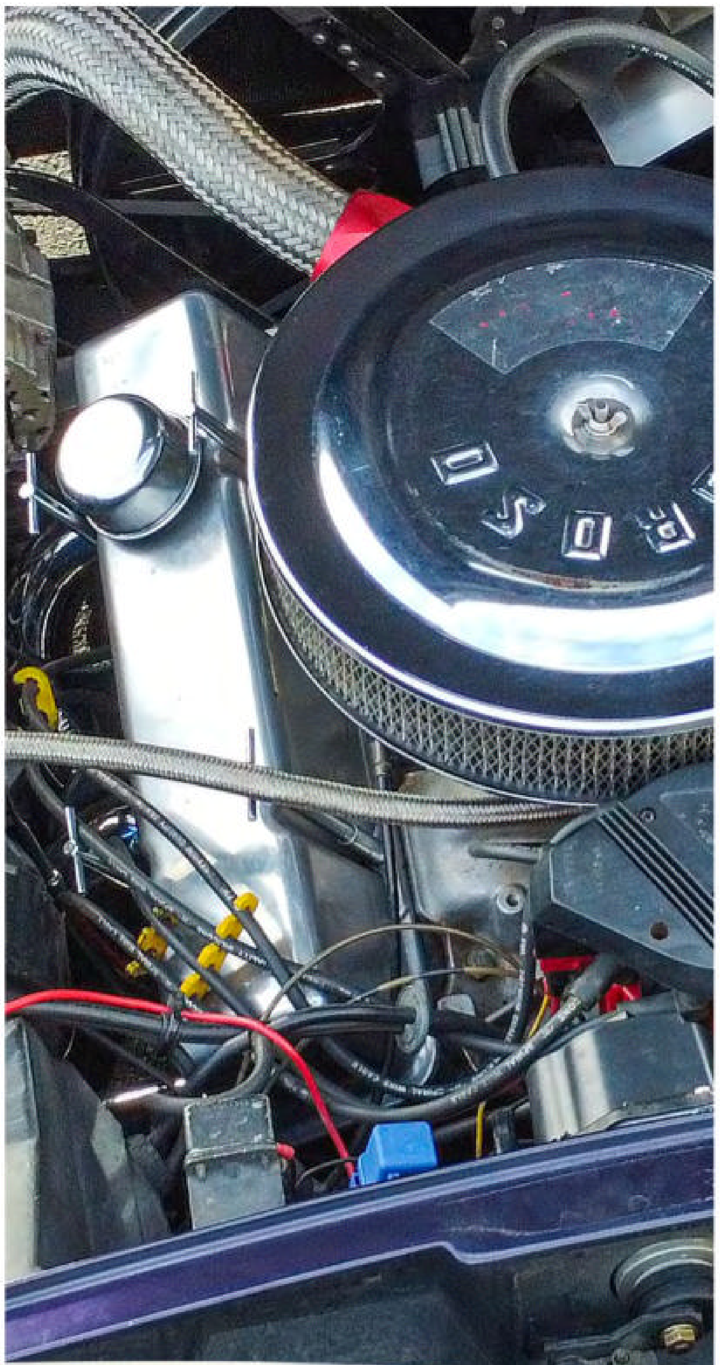
At the time, Jeff was in primary school. The Corvette captured his young heart, its over-the-top Coke-bottle curves making the cars that were journeying up and down New Zealand roads look very bland in comparison. The words of the article's subheading stated "Go directly to the Chevrolet Sports Department. Do not stop. Do not pay $200. They're not about to sell the first American Ferrari that cheap". →

The photo shoot had to wait until after we had said hello and chatted to the gentleman who had been the rural postie since 1968

COOPER COBRA
RADIAL G/T

The split removable T-top roof was a standard feature for the C3 Corvette

ORJET
Stingray
COOPER COBRA
RADIAL G/T



The story was written by automotive journalist Eric Dahlquist, an employee of *Motor Trend*, who would have been very well regarded by the Chevrolet sales department. He goes on to write in the first paragraph:

"Button down your mind. Tight. Lock it in place and twist up the safety wire. You're on the border of your imagination. The front door of the terminal is the nearest Chevrolet Sports Department, and they won't care if you run; you've waited for this since you heard the first 265 power pack 'Vette go up through those four delicious gears. The low pitch whine of the T-10 at full song is the sound of your soul being set free."

And it goes on with several more similar 'honest' journalistic facts and 'unbiased' statements. That article, along with the several black-and-white pictures printed on the newsprint, would stay with Jeff. He still has the magazine.

Over-the-top magazine articles aside, 1969 was just before the petrol shortage and tighter emissions rules strangled the car, American cars in particular. Unaware of what would soon befall the industry, Corvette engineer Zora Arkus-Duntov had created an impressive sports car for Chevrolet. The Corvette was well on the way to becoming Chevrolet's halo car and the US's best and only sports car.

LITTLE ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES

Many years passed, and it would not be until 1987 when Jeff had the means to begin looking for his first proper muscle car. Browsing through the Saturday-morning *Herald* one day, he saw a 1971 C3 Corvette advertised in New Plymouth. It was 16 years old, a little rough around the edges, but affordable. The car had not been driven by a little old lady to church and back; it had been driven to the local drag meet and raced. The owner, who had done club drag racing, showed Jeff what the car could do, slamming the car through the gears and blasting it to warp speed on the local dual carriageway. Jeff

COOPER COBRA
RADIAL G/T

A great view showing the generational changes

> This car could not be mistaken from the driver's seat for being anything other than a 'Vette

was instantly addicted, and money changed hands.

Thirty-five years later, Jeff still owns the Corvette. The original white colour has been changed to a stunning purple, making it stand out from the crowd instantly in any car park. The rear transverse leaf spring has been upgraded to the composite fibreglass spring used on later C3 cars. To ensure that the car starts as easily as modern cars, Jeff has added electronic ignition. Other modifications that set this car apart from similar '71 Corvettes are the side pipes, a Mallory tach, and a Hurst shifter. The wheels that it wears were first shown on Corvettes in 1973 but were not available until 1976. Apart from those few changes, the car is more or less as it was when Jeff bought it.

BACK ROADS

After the photo shoot, I had the opportunity to drive the C3 through more of Taihape's back roads. It did not take long to get used to the throw of the four-speed gearbox. The clutch that connected it to the 350-cubic-inch (ci) (5735cc) V8 was remarkably light. In fact, the car was very easy to drive. I even had time to admire some tall cliffs as I whipped it around tight scenic corners that only the locals really know about. The steering was light with a tendency to oversteer, which was held in check by the wide rear tyres. Looking down the long bonnet with its huge bulge in the middle and classic high Corvette front fenders, this car could not be mistaken from the driver's seat for being anything other than a 'Vette.

I was following Jeff, who was driving my C5. We had been driving for about 40 minutes when he turned left down a muddy farm drive before stopping in front of a farmer's workshop. But this was no ordinary workshop. Inside, under construction, were three replica world →

The Corvette captured Jeff's heart from a young age

rally-winning Lancia 037s all destined for overseas buyers. I spent a pleasant hour wandering around these cars talking to the design engineer who was building them, making a mental note to return at a later date to get the full story. That is, if I could ever find the place again.

Afterwards, we headed to Mangaweka for a late lunch, where Jeff and I swapped car stories and discovered that we knew several people in common. Taihape may be a small town, but the car community is a close-knit bunch of people where friends are made easily.

CORVETTE GATHERING

Returning to the Taihape Workingmen's Club, I discovered it had apparently become a honeypot for Corvettes. The people that I had met the day before had brought theirs along for a bit of a get-together. After a bit of Corvette conversation, I was asked where I wanted to take them to get some photographs. It was certainly too good an opportunity to pass up, photographing four Corvettes from four different generations together. I pointed to the biggest building that I could see on the hill and said, "how about there?"

We parked the cars in front of what had apparently been a convent and lined them up in numerical order. Jeff suggested that I take some pictures from the upstairs balcony. He knew the owner of the building. By now, I was not surprised at how many people Jeff knew but I was not expecting the owner to be his brother, Phillip. After I had taken the pictures, along with those of Steve Cope and Ken Cribb, owners of the Corvettes, we spent a pleasant evening chewing the fat and sharing drinks on the balcony looking across the friendly town that is Taihape. I knew for sure that I would be returning to dig out some more stories.

The next day as I was getting ready to leave the motel, a 1971 Chevrolet El Camino rumbled into the car park. Thinking, *if you don't ask, you don't get*, I wandered over to greet the young owner of the car. He had bought it the day before, in my home town of Wellington, and my next stop. ■

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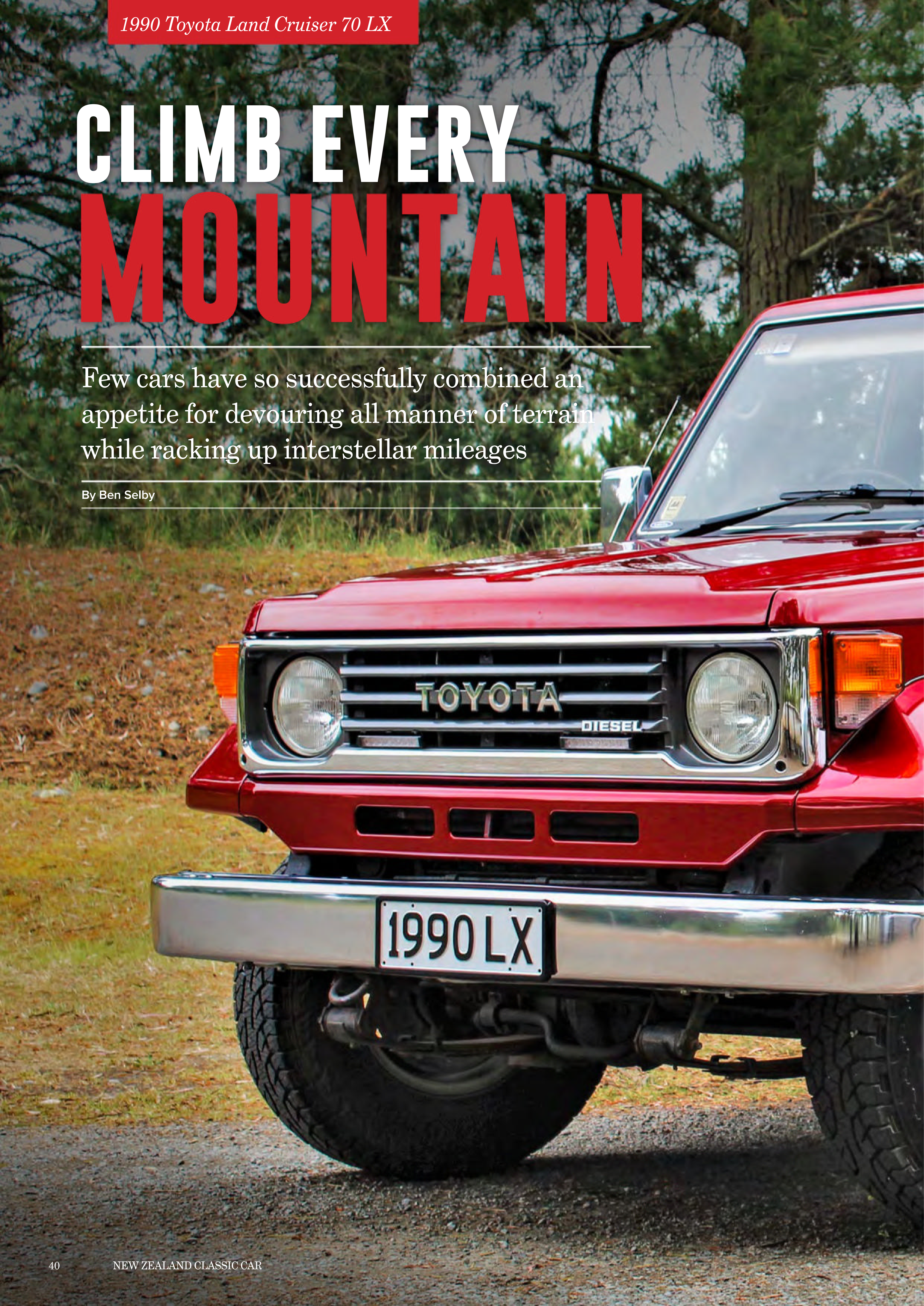

CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

Few cars have so successfully combined an appetite for devouring all manner of terrain while racking up interstellar mileages

By Ben Selby

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER
Dynapro AT M
Hankook

The interior is well designed for the serious off-roader

Remember that bit in *The Sound of Music* when "Climb every mountain / Ford every stream" is sung by the Mother Abbess? Well, that's what plays in my head when I consider the mighty Toyota Land Cruiser.

Over here, and over there, in the land of Australia (not Austria, this time), prior to Toyota's arrival, the farming community's rugged right hand was at the helm of a Land Rover. When the Land Cruiser arrived, and especially in Australia, where big highway miles are a vital part of country life, that all changed. During the '90s and '00s, it appears that no Aussie bush-ranger would drive anything else.

THE LEGEND LIVES ON

It was largely the same here, although the tough Toyota's legendary reliability over hundreds of thousands of miles took a little longer to accumulate. Just the same, countless Land Cruisers found themselves climbing all manner of mountains and fording every available stream on a daily basis from Cape Reinga to Bluff, for a good deal more years than many people expected. These days, an original Land Cruiser 70 is finally becoming more of a rarity but those that remain quickly catch the eye of those who recognise its pioneering prowess. First introduced in 1984, the 70 was a continuation of the much-loved FJ40. While it has been built in a number of guises and at various spec levels, even appearing as a 13-seater in the long-wheelbase 78 — a favourite among NGOs in the Third World — the 70 LX was the more common sight on our roads from 1984 to 1999.

TOYOTA LANDCRUISER

Remarkably, the Land Cruiser 70 LX is still in production today and, unlike other modern off-roaders, it retains its basic shape and style, albeit equipped with some modern tech and a 4.5-litre diesel V8. Earlier Land Cruiser 70 LXs were commonly powered by a range of four- and six-cylinder petrol or diesel engines. What makes this 70 LX rather different is the limited-run five-cylinder diesel engine that lies behind that square-jawed front end.

Its 1PZ 3.5-litre five was produced from 1990 to 2001, but only a handful found their way into the 70 LX. Derived from Toyota's 4.2-litre 1HZ six-cylinder diesel block, the 1PZ was just as robust and smooth as its six-pot counterpart. Power was rated at 85kW and torque at 230Nm. Mated to a five-speed manual box with high and low range four-wheel-drive, it is regarded by some as one of Toyota's greatest power units. →

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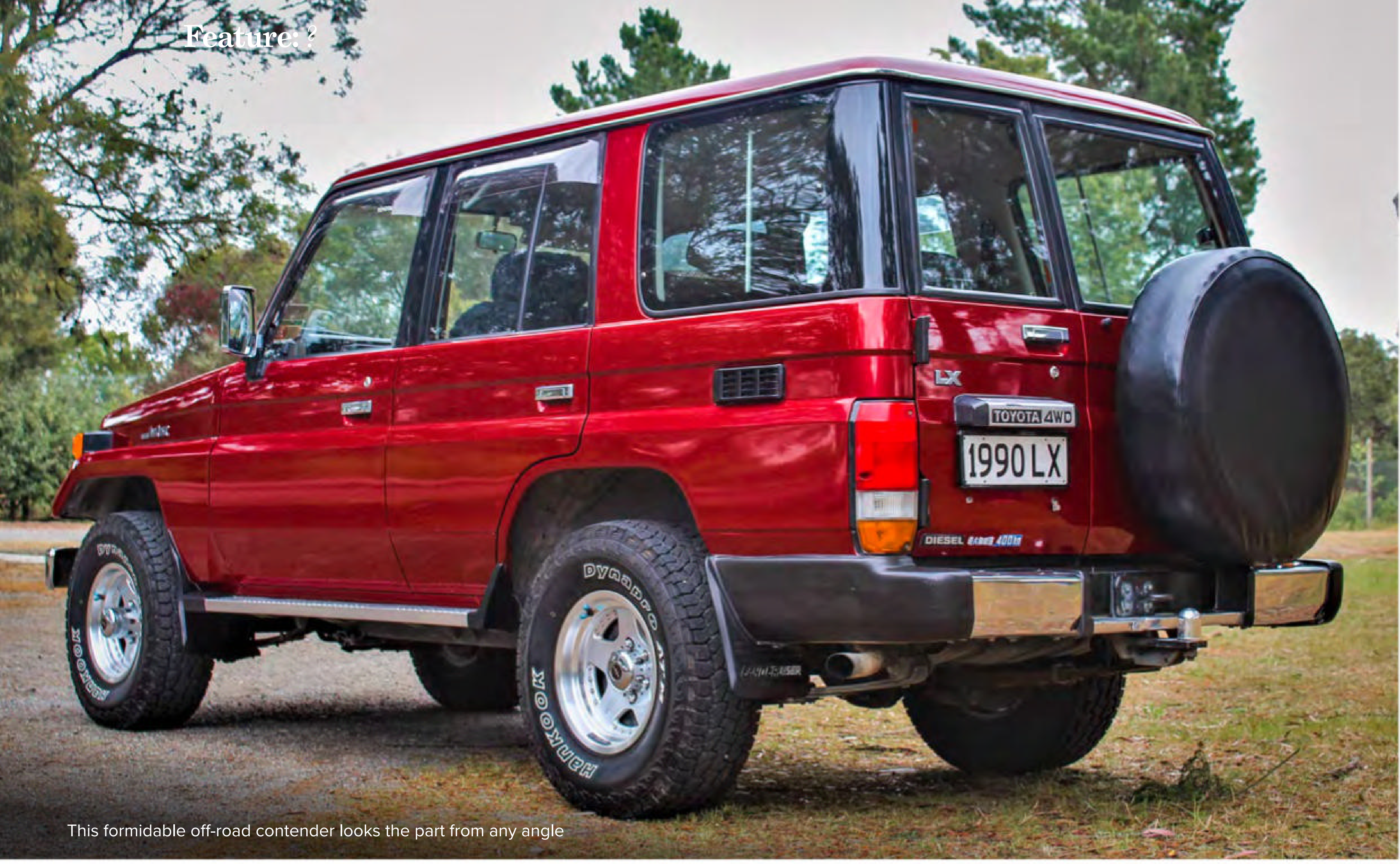


This formidable off-road contender looks the part from any angle

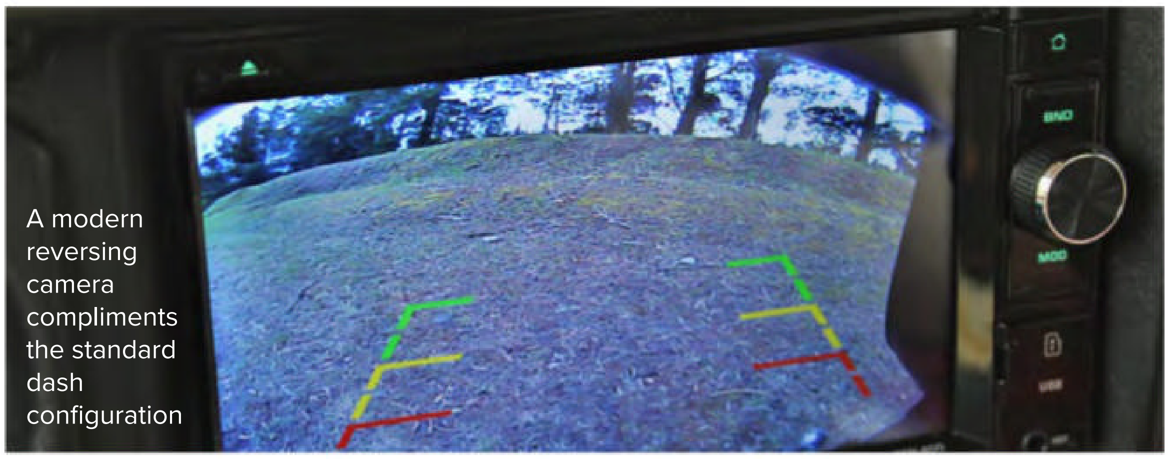
SWEET SPOT

One of its fans is owner Sandra Moore. Sandra has a penchant for all things mechanical and her love affair with the Land Cruiser can be traced back to having a play with a friend's BJ44.

"I found it rather teeth-rattling, but I was certainly impressed with its capabilities. It was just so cool — but I decided I wanted a Land Cruiser that was a bit more comfortable," she says.

The 70 LX fitted the bill and in fact Sandra has owned two. "This one is actually my second one. I found my first one in a car yard and I bought it for $20K. It had a sunroof and manual window winders but I sold it when I moved to Christchurch city," says Sandra.

> The LX had covered 147,727km when Sandra bought the car and, 17 years later, it is still going strong at over 309,000km



A modern reversing camera compliments the standard dash configuration

Acquiring this immaculate LX was very much a case of Land Cruiser déjà vu. "In about 2005, I sat down in my local fish and chip shop and picked up a copy of the free car dealer classifieds magazine. I saw an ad for 'quality 4WDs' from High Country 4WD Centre on Fitzgerald Avenue and saw an LX 70 just like my old one for $12,500. I went to look at it, just for old time's sake, and I was offered a test drive. That was it — I wasn't going to let this one go, even though at the time it smelt like old socks," she laughs.

Sandra's 70 LX, which she affectionately refers to as "the Cruiser", was imported from Japan in 1997 by Drummond & Etheridge Limited of Ashburton. Sandra is the third owner and since taking ownership in 2005 she has kept it in excellent condition, inside and out. "I make sure she is extremely well maintained. She is always garaged and meticulously serviced," Sandra says.

TWO-WAY STREET

The LX had covered 147,727km when Sandra bought it and, 17 years later, it is still going strong at over 309,000km. While it is no secret that even a moderately well-kept Toyota of this vintage is likely to keep going till the end of time, Sandra's commitment to the condition of her LX makes sure it will remain one of the absolute best on New Zealand roads. "Anything she needs, I do," says Sandra.

The LX's clutch was replaced in 2012 and new glow plugs were fitted in 2014. New shock absorbers were installed in 2015 and the starter solenoid was reconditioned in 2017. In 2018, the radiator was re-cored at 290,249km and new Hankook ATRs were fitted the following year. Over the last two years, the LX has been given a new cam belt, spring eye bushes, shock bushes and sway bar link bushes,

WINNER
Moutere Hop
Moutere Hop 2021
Best Japanese

Right: Well-deserved trophy for Best Japanese is testament to the condition of Sandra's Cruiser

It looks like no-one has ever sat in the back seats

and two new heavy-duty batteries. If anyone is tempted to think that's getting to be a rather long list for a supposedly unbreakable car, you will note almost to the humblest washer that the bits replaced were limited-life parts, which had clearly earned their retirement.

"I love engines, so more often than not I put the overalls on and get stuck in with my mechanic," says Sandra.

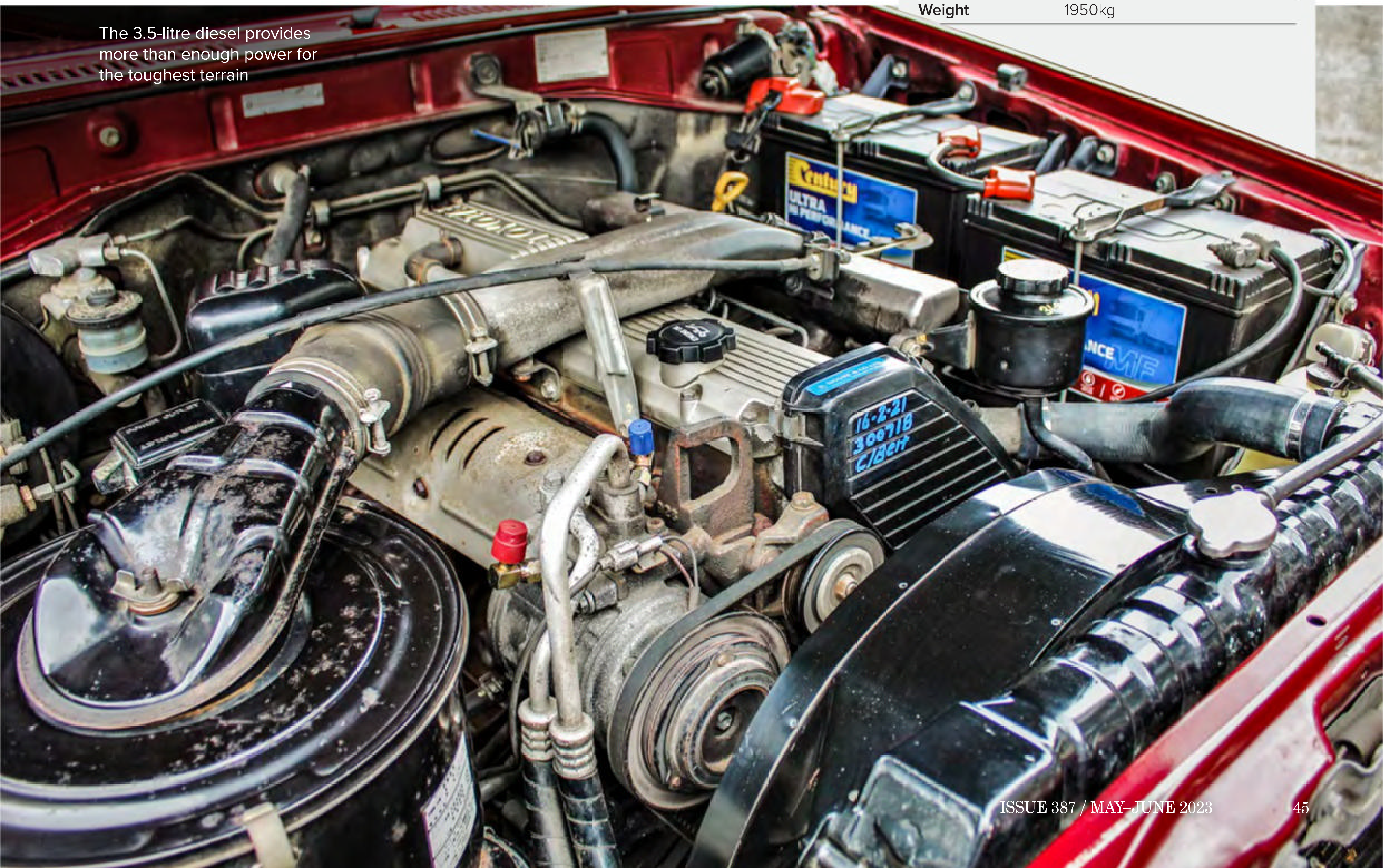
The only things that aren't factory on Sandra's Land Cruiser are the CV928 alloys and a touchscreen multimedia head unit with reversing camera. "I still have the original tape deck and radio, but I like having the reversing camera so you can see the tow ball. I travel a lot to Christchurch and back from my place in Orinoco and it makes parking with trailers easier," she explains.

GENTLE GIANT

Sandra and the Cruiser have been inseparable. Many times, she has turned down the opportunity to drive newer cars because the Toyota has always been her favourite form of transport. →

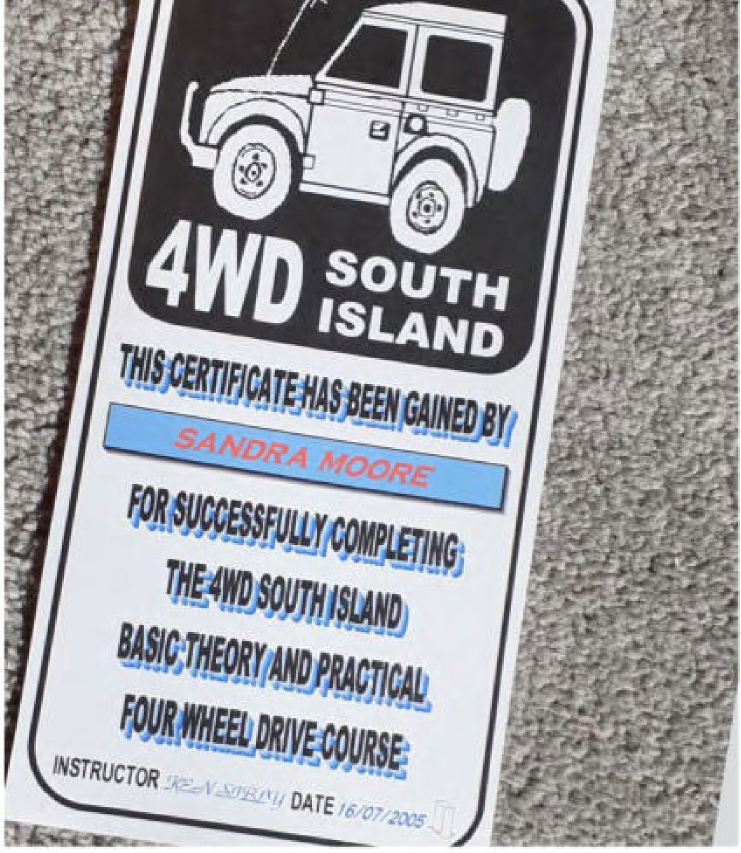
1990 TOYOTA LAND CRUISER 70 LX

Engine	1PZ five-cylinder diesel
Capacity	3.5-litre
Bore/Stroke	94mm/100mm
Valves	Two per cylinder, single-overhead camshaft
Max. power	85kW at 4000rpm
Max. torque	230Nm at 2600rpm
Transmission	Five-speed manual with low-/high-range 4WD
Suspension	Semi-elliptic leaf-spring
Dimensions	
Length	4995mm
Width	1870mm
Height	1955mm
Weight	1950kg



The 3.5-litre diesel provides more than enough power for the toughest terrain

Plenty of space for all the equipment needed for an off-road camping excursion



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BASIC THEORY AND PRACTICAL

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Despite having passed a 4WD test in the Cruiser, Sandra's LX has never been subjected to any rough treatment. "I only really use it for open-road travelling and it has never been bush-bashed or had any kind of towing abuse," she says.

With Sandra beside me in "the Cruiser" we go for a wee strop. In classic, common rail-diesel fashion, there is a bit of shake, rattle, and roll as that hefty 3.5-litre five-cylinder diesel engine awakes from its slumber. Seconds later, five pistons are chugging in harmony. First gear is selected and it is time to move off.

Surprisingly, even given Sandra's attention, the Cruiser still feels as tight as a drum when on the move. Comfortable fabric seats keep you snuggly in place and, when you feed in the power, the 1PZ shows itself as smooth as its reputation proclaims. Up to around 3500rpm, those 230Nm provide some strong pulling power. It's small wonder Sandra is happy behind the wheel and serene even when towing.

The car, despite its built-for-bush-bashing looks, is also remarkably comfortable. Sure, its all-terrain rubber does emit a degree of tyre roar, but as you sit high up and snugly in place, it's easy to imagine the Cruiser as the companion of choice for some Canterbury high-country journeys.

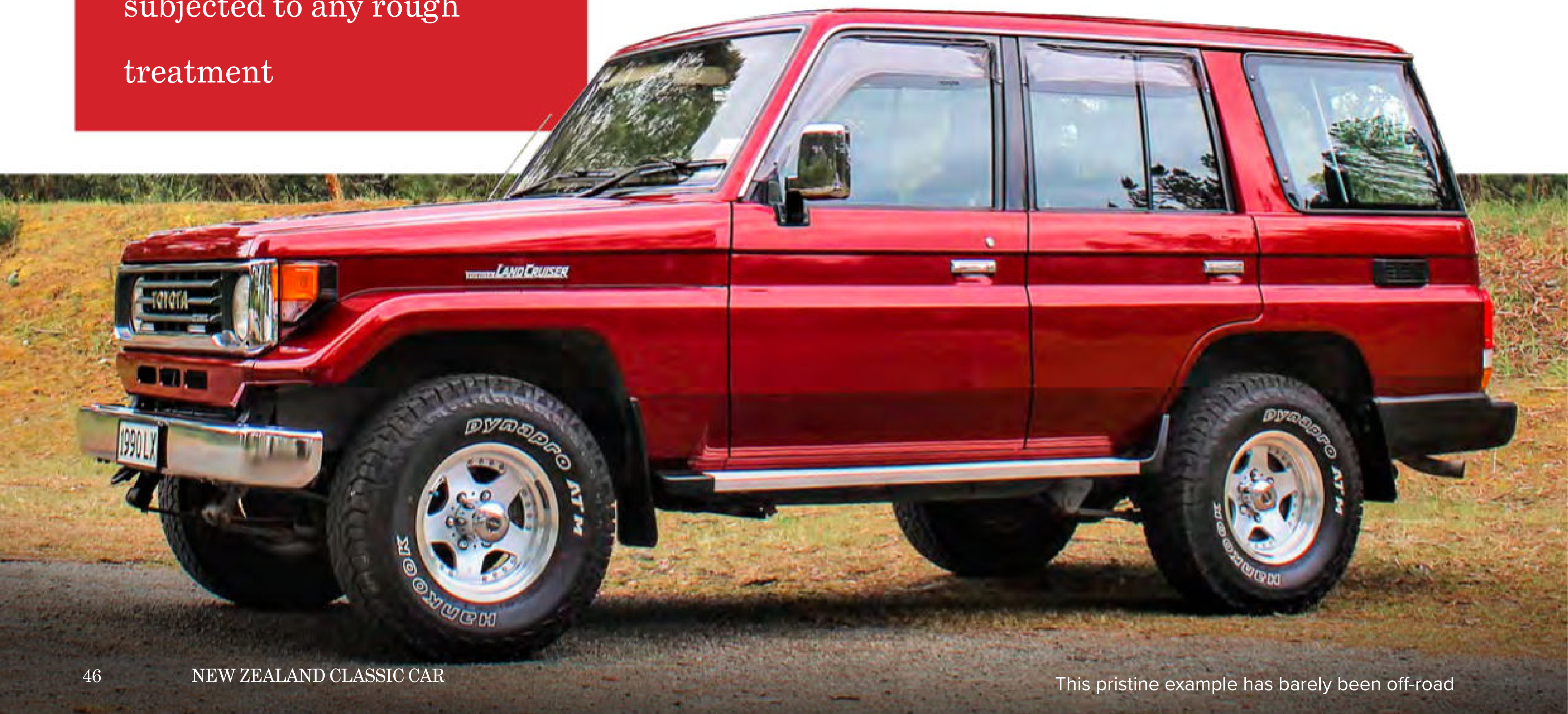
The drive is brief, mostly along the heavily wooded tarmac road through McLeans Island behind Christchurch Airport before turning back towards Orana Wildlife Park. There are a number of gravel roads nearby and places ideal for some off-road fun, but this idea is quickly discarded as Sandra had spent the morning getting it extra sparkly for today's rendezvous. "People ask me what I do to relax. I tell them, I clean my car," she laughs.

Sandra's LX is nothing short of stunning. Plenty of others think so too, as the LX was recently awarded Winner of Best Japanese Vehicle at the Moutere Hop 2021 and 2022 Waimak Classic Car Show.

"She has really gotten under my skin," says Sandra. "I have also had so many comments from people when out and about. One guy asked if it was my husband's. When I replied that it was mine, he responded by wanting to shake my hand," she says. "I have three beautiful grand-daughters who all love the Cruiser; it's their unwavering choice of transport. One grand-daughter is also keen to drive it for me when she turns 16."

Clearly Sandra has no plans to sell, so residents of Canterbury and the upper South Island will probably see plenty more of Sandra's mint Cruiser over the coming years. ■

> Despite having passed a 4WD test in the Cruiser, Sandra's LX has never been subjected to any rough treatment



This pristine example has barely been off-road

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A PHANTOM WITH ROYAL HERITAGE

More than 50 years ago, a Rolls-Royce Phantom VI limousine transported Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, and Princess Anne around the country during their 1970 royal visit. Now, the transformed Phantom brings dignity to some of the new king's subjects' final rides

By Christopher Moor; photography by Ross de Rouffignac, *New Zealand Classic Car* archives

2
GIVE WAY
ZSF 570

The royal motorcade in Fergusson Drive, Upper Hutt

The New Zealand government purchased two Rolls-Royce Phantom VI limousines for the 1970 royal tour. After the royals left New Zealand, one limousine went into vice-regal service as the official car for New Zealand Governors-General until 1996. The other Rolls-Royce went on to have a more varied life in the colonies.

During the royal tour, the Rolls-Royce's strait-laced face and radiator took on a bit of a grimace after a meeting with a local — a sheep on a rural road. The front end repaired, the limousine was sold to the Westhaven cabaret in Auckland, which used the car as a courtesy vehicle for its customers for two years. Auckland funeral directors WH Tongue and Son Ltd then bought the limousine and had it converted into a hearse. The rear seats that so comfortably carried royalty were removed to create the deck for the 'caskets', which seems to be the term funeral directors prefer for 'coffins'. →

> A royalist himself, Gavin says that his grandmother would have loved to have ridden in this Phantom VI

Queen Elizabeth II on the Royal Tour of New Zealand

Gee & Hickton
DYR348

The black colour scheme highlights the laser-straight bodywork

Just enough room for the spare wheel

Fawn micro suede lines the casket area

SIPPING TEA

Gee & Hickton's general manager, Gavin Murphy, bought the hearse in late 2008 from Sibuns, which had joined with WH Tongue from 1996, after he had seen it advertised for sale in a funeral industry publication. The idea of buying the former royal transport hearse came to him after hearing of his grandmother winning a prize of taking tea at the lakeside spot where the Queen was to partake of a cuppa herself during the 1970 royal visit.

A royalist himself, Gavin says that his grandmother would have loved to have ridden in this Phantom VI. "It's a piece of New Zealand history," he states proudly.

"People see the Rolls-Royce as an attention-getter for the business. It's a real point of difference. They're just beautiful hand-made vehicles. And it's so big — it's got a real persona about it." This Phantom VI is more than 6m long and 2m wide, and weighs about 2.75 tons.

ROLLING WRECK

When the hearse arrived at Gee & Hickton Limited, it had seen better days. Gavin says that it was less 'royal carriage' and more 'rolling wreckage'. The engine had seized and the body and frame warranted stripping it back to bare metal. Gavin says that he even saw the start of a few rust blisters in the old paint.

The hearse went to David Wilkens and his dedicated team at automotive specialists Bristols in Upper Hutt, where an extensive restoration took place over several months. The Rolls-Royce finally left the workshop in November 2009 looking absolutely pristine, ready to resume its sombre career and begin its new role serving the people of the lower North Island.

The work included restoring the original 6.2-litre V8 motor, a body repaint, recovering the two-part front seat in tan leather, and replacing the linings in the casket area with fawn macro suede. The handsome dashboard is made from decorative koa wood, a native of Hawaii, with Smiths instruments fitted. Apart from the analogue instruments and the near-vertical windows, what instantly recalls the hearse's 20th-century origins are the ashtrays in the front side doors. In its heyday, smoking was popular and a chauffeur would naturally expect to have a quick puff while waiting for his passengers.

ROLLS
RR
ROYCE

The New Zealand flag takes pride of place

An electronic ignition added in the upgrade ensures the engine always starts the first time and an electronic motor was fitted to control the casket deck.

Gavin has not divulged the cost of the hearse, nor that of the restoration, beyond saying it reached into the "hundreds of thousands of dollars".

Parts and maintenance are "horrendously expensive", and he claims that he doesn't know — almost certainly doesn't want to know — the fuel consumption, which we estimate to be 8–10mpg in city areas.

Sumptuous tan leather — a perfect choice for the split front seat

Ross reckons the driver seldom has two passengers with him

CHOSEN LOCATION

Gavin had an important meeting to attend, so funeral director Kevin Algar stood in for him at the photo shoot. He drove photographer Ross de Rouffignac and me to the chosen location of Vogel House, Lower Hutt. The day before, Ross had received permission from the owners for us to take photos on the lawn the next day.

Vogel House is a listed Lower Hutt heritage home, where Her Majesty dined as the guest of a former New Zealand prime minister, Sir Robert Muldoon, in 1977. Since being built for James and Jocelyn Vogel in 1933, the property has also been the home of the Australian High Commissioner, prime ministers, and a temporary residence for the Governor-General before reverting back to Vogel family ownership. →

Native Hawaiian timber and Smiths gauges provide that classic English ambience

Kevin behind the wheel

BEST OF BRITISH

Kevin agrees with Gavin that part of the hearse's appeal lies in its foibles. Braking requires some prudence to overcome the momentum retained by the length and weight. Both, though, contribute positively to its smooth progress on the road, which was nothing less than expected from the 'best of British' automotive production.

Ross reckons that the driver seldom has two passengers with him. The two-seater bench that they might occupy encourages the posture that young pupils were encouraged to adopt at school, when the car was new, as in sitting up straight with feet firmly on the floor. The view through the windscreen with its arrowing bonnet lines helps the driver take full advantage of the road and surroundings while preserving a useful distance and perspective.

Kevin tells us that the flag fluttering on the driver's side mudguard is changed to that of the deceased's birth country as a mark of respect when the hearse is chosen for their service.

When asked if he likes driving the hearse, Kevin says, "Yes. I do." For a view to the rear, he relies mostly on wing mirrors. Although, on this occasion vision through the rear window was good, the mirrors are a better option when flowers are stacked on a casket in the rear.

Seeing the spare wheel concealed under the casket deck was unexpected, as was finding the side doors hiding the running boards when they're closed.

Unlike many other classics I've talked about with their owners, this one doesn't have a given name, although when Kevin affectionately called it 'The Phantom', it seemed to fit nicely. ■

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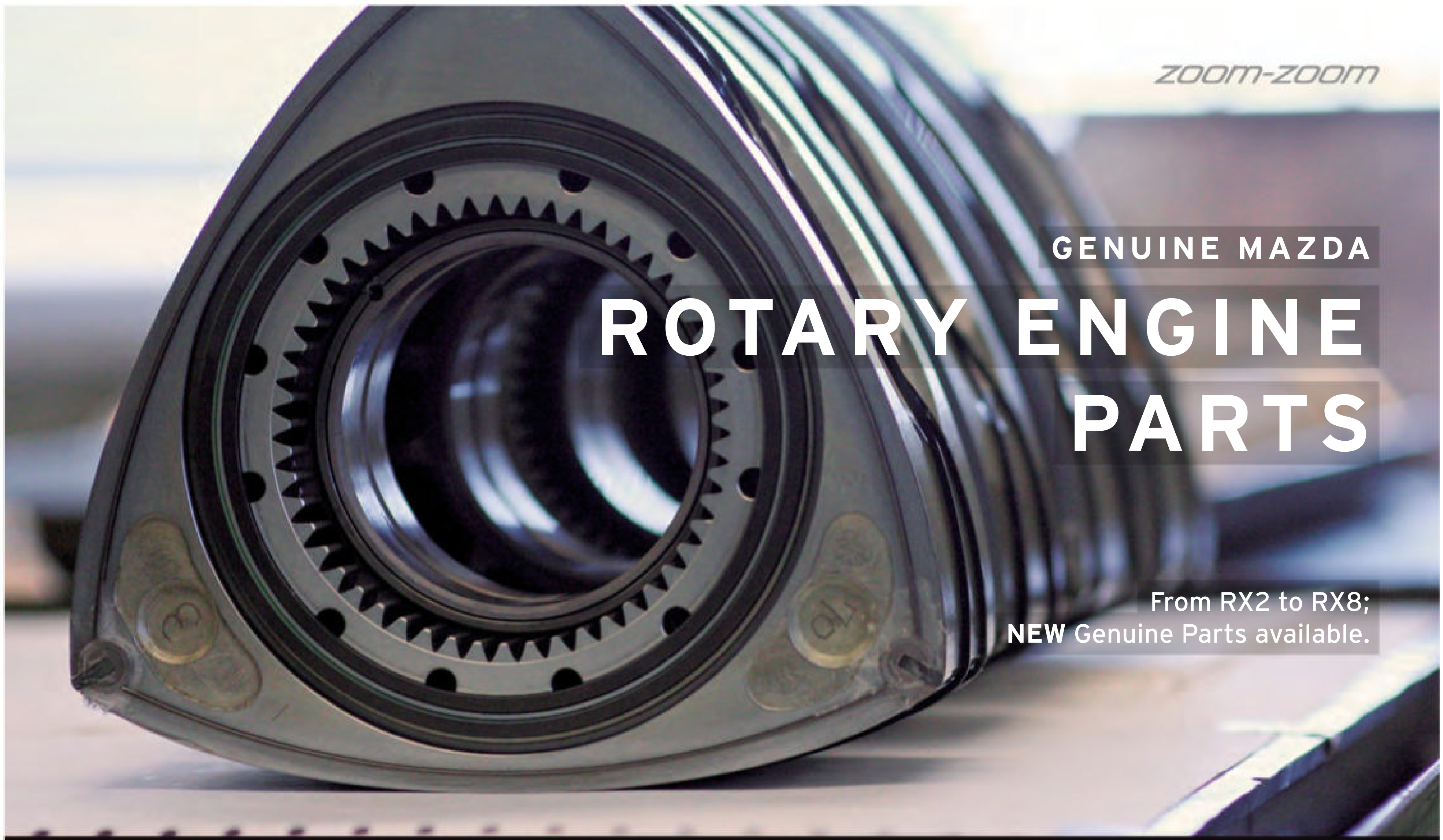

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AUTOMOTIVE *Nirvana*

The Petersen Automotive Museum anchors the eastern end of the famed 'Miracle Mile', that length of Wilshire Boulevard that boasts numerous world-class museums

By Vaughan Wilson

Fairfax Av
FRANK GEHRY
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Mercedes Warhol exhibit

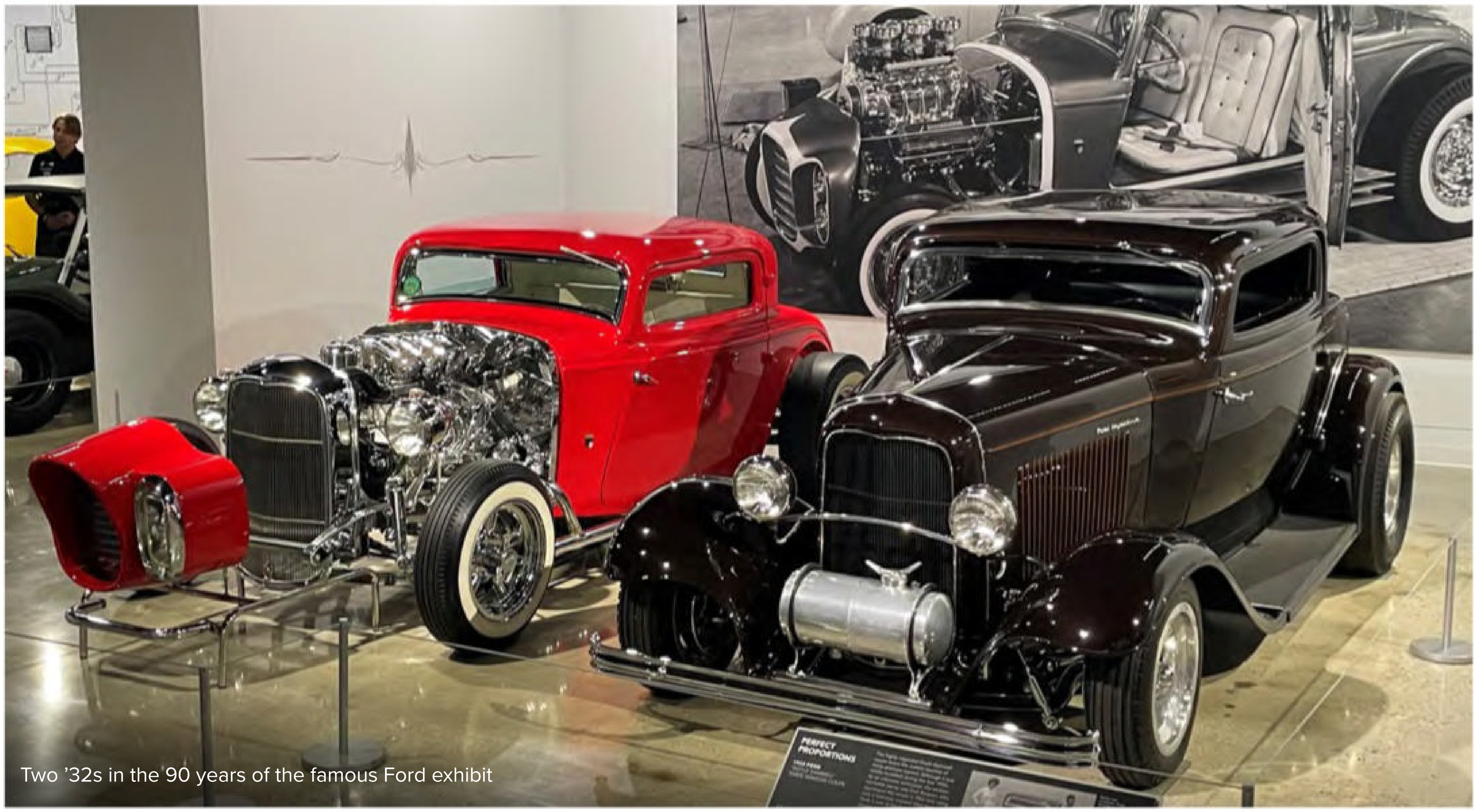
Many people will tell you that the heart of the American auto industry is in Detroit. For others, the place that leads the US and possibly the world in terms of personalising the horseless carriage and taking it closer to artistic endeavour is Southern California. The perfect weather, near boundless wealth, and the fact that the automobile is a necessity — at least in LA, which has poor public transport alternatives — have created an environment that delights in all things automotive.

It's the natural setting for what many consider the Holy Grail of car museums, the Petersen Automotive Museum. This magical kingdom, a Disneyland for car enthusiasts, is firmly rooted in California's car culture, but it also vaunts an artistic approach to displaying its wares.

THE ART OF THE AUTOMOBILE

Unlike many famous car museums around the world, the Petersen is comparatively young. It was founded on 11 June 1994 by magazine publisher Robert E Petersen and his wife, Margie. The Petersen Automotive Museum is now owned and operated by the Petersen Automotive Museum Foundation.

The Petersen also has philanthropic ideals. Naturally enough, it was the late Mr Petersen who purchased and put together the original collection. In more recent times, given the Petersen's reputation as one of the world's best car museums, owners of significant vehicles are approached to gift their vehicles →



Two '32s in the '90 years of the famous Ford exhibit

1948 Tucker

to the museum, and plenty are flattered to do so. The entrance fee assists with operating costs. The museum works as a charity by providing education, courses, and fundraising for students and others who don't have the financial backing to pursue their chosen career in the automotive world.

Also unlike most car museums, which have the cars lined up in serried ranks with signs displaying the relevant details, the Petersen seeks to display the artistry, the designs, the engineering, and the history of the automobile in ever-changing exhibitions.

PEERLESS DESIGN

The Petersen is located at the end of the 'Miracle Mile' at 606 Wilshire Boulevard, which is the third-most-traversed intersection in Los Angeles. Initially housed within the History Museum of Los Angeles, it was shifted to its present location, a former department store that opened in 1962 and closed in 1986. Robert Petersen chose this site not only for its location and layout but also for its largely windowless design, which would protect the exhibits from harmful UV

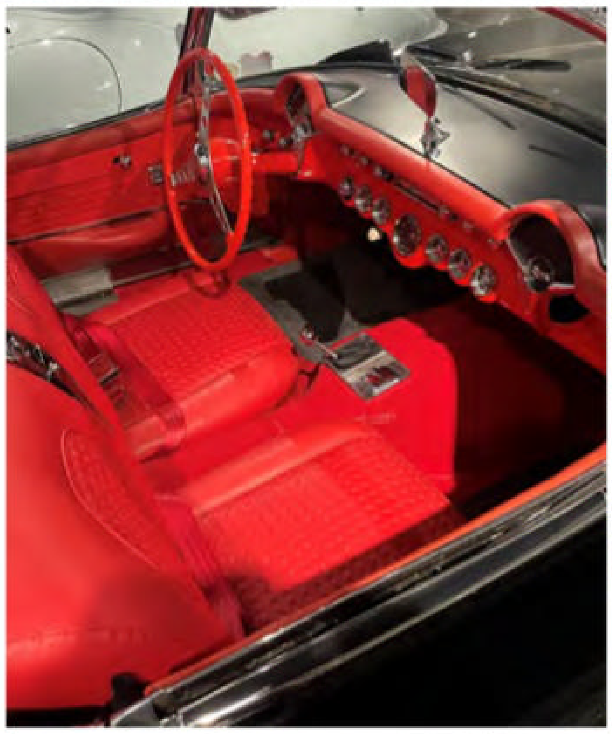
> The Petersen seeks to display the artistry, the designs, the engineering, and the history of the automobile in ever-changing exhibitions

Automotive artistry at its finest

Looking ahead to the future

Ferrari heaven

Various exhibits including James Bond vehicles



PIONEER
INO

rays. As you'd expect in LA, the site also has a generous visitor car park.

In 2015, the property underwent a massive US$90 million renovation, the upgrade including a new façade. US architectural firm Kohn Pedersen Fox designed the futuristic façade that is a work of art itself and sets the scene for what is on display inside. It features a stainless-steel ribbon assembly consisting of more than 100 tons of steel. Erecting this life-size Meccano set involved stitching 308 pieces of the steel together with 25 supports using 140,000 custom stainless-steel screws.

The ground floor is split into two parts. Twenty or so vehicles and a large gift shop with all sorts of vehicle-related goodies are free for all to visit. The remainder of the ground floor is split into several display areas. Visitors to the museum have two ticket options, →

> Visitors would be wise to start in the basement, as visiting hours finish earlier for the lower level than for the upper three levels

and most choose both, if time allows, which should be an entire day.

The first ticket option is for the ground floor — level one in the US — and the two floors above. Visitors take the lift to the top floor and work their way down checking out around 150 vehicles in 25 or so exhibits. I rushed through with my wife and three-year-old and it still took two hours.

The second ticket is for the basement, which houses around 200–250 vehicles displayed in a more traditional way. Effectively, this is the museum's storage area. Access hours to the basement are restricted, but you can take a guided tour of this lower level. Unfortunately, I did not have time to see it. Visitors would be wise to start in the basement, as visiting hours finish earlier for the lower level than for the upper three levels.

AN EDUCATION

The Petersen seeks to tell the story of the automobile. To that end, each of the three main floors has a slightly different purpose, all three together creating the narrative. The exhibits are only on display for a set period before being replaced with something else. The museum is always changing, giving visitors plenty of reason to come back.

The ground floor (level one) focuses on automotive artistry and showcases the extravagance of the industry. Level two focuses on auto industrial engineering, design, and performance and incorporates interactive teaching exhibits. Exhibits on race vehicles, hot rods and motorcycles tend to be on this level. Level three delves more into the history of the automobile, with an emphasis on the car culture of Southern California. →

Below: The Ross Page Special, Mid-Continent Securities Special, and the Kuzma sprint car in the *Legends of Los Angeles: Southern California Race Cars and Their Builders* exhibit

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Nicole and Sierra beside one of her favourite movie heroes — Lightning McQueen

Back to the Future DeLorean

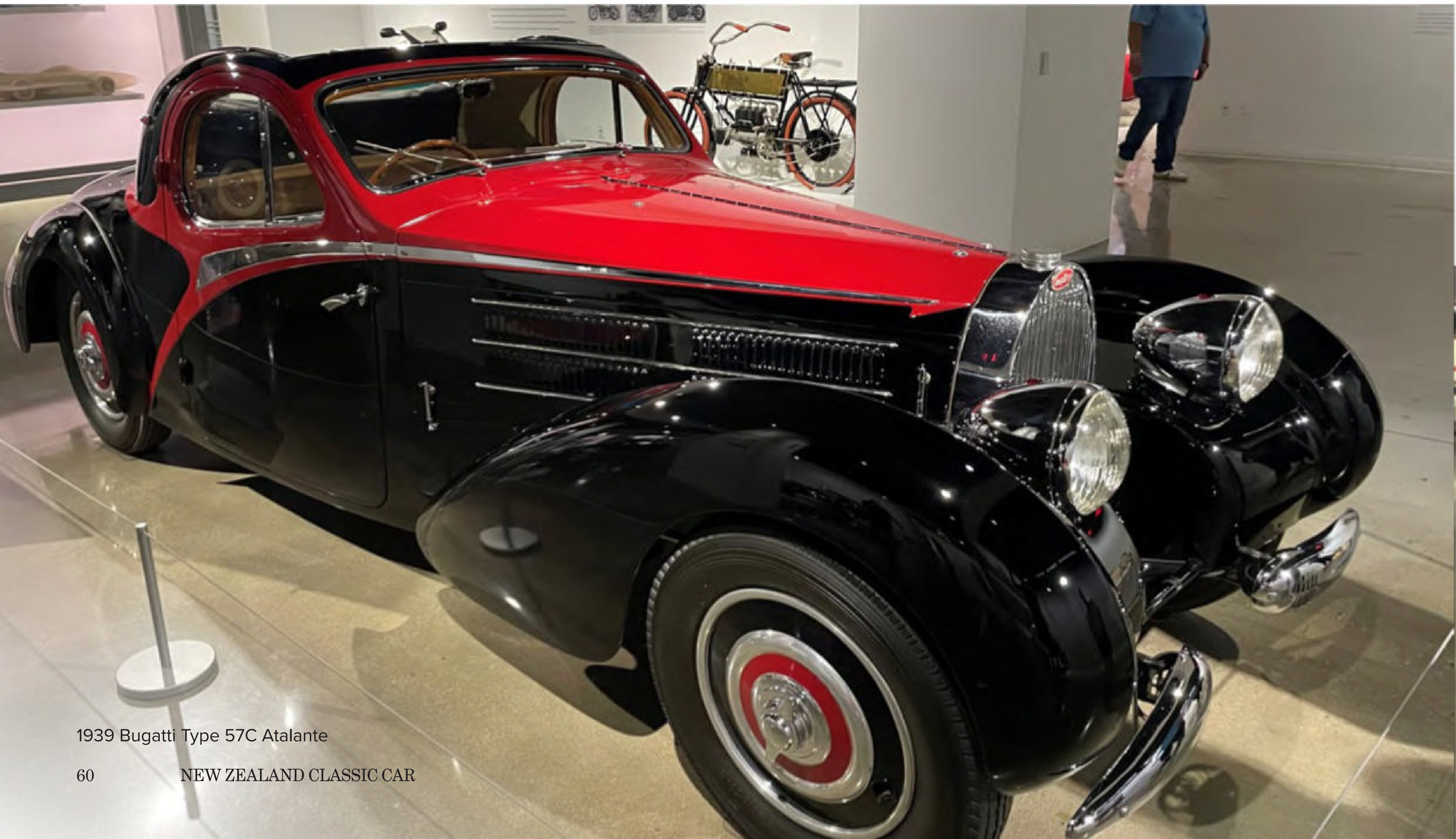
We took the lift to the third level, stepping onto a floor that originally sold bedding, furniture, and electronic appliances back in the 1960s and 1970s. Now, it is a beautiful, crisp white space with vehicles in all directions, set out so that visitors can walk around and enjoy looking at the exhibits from various angles.

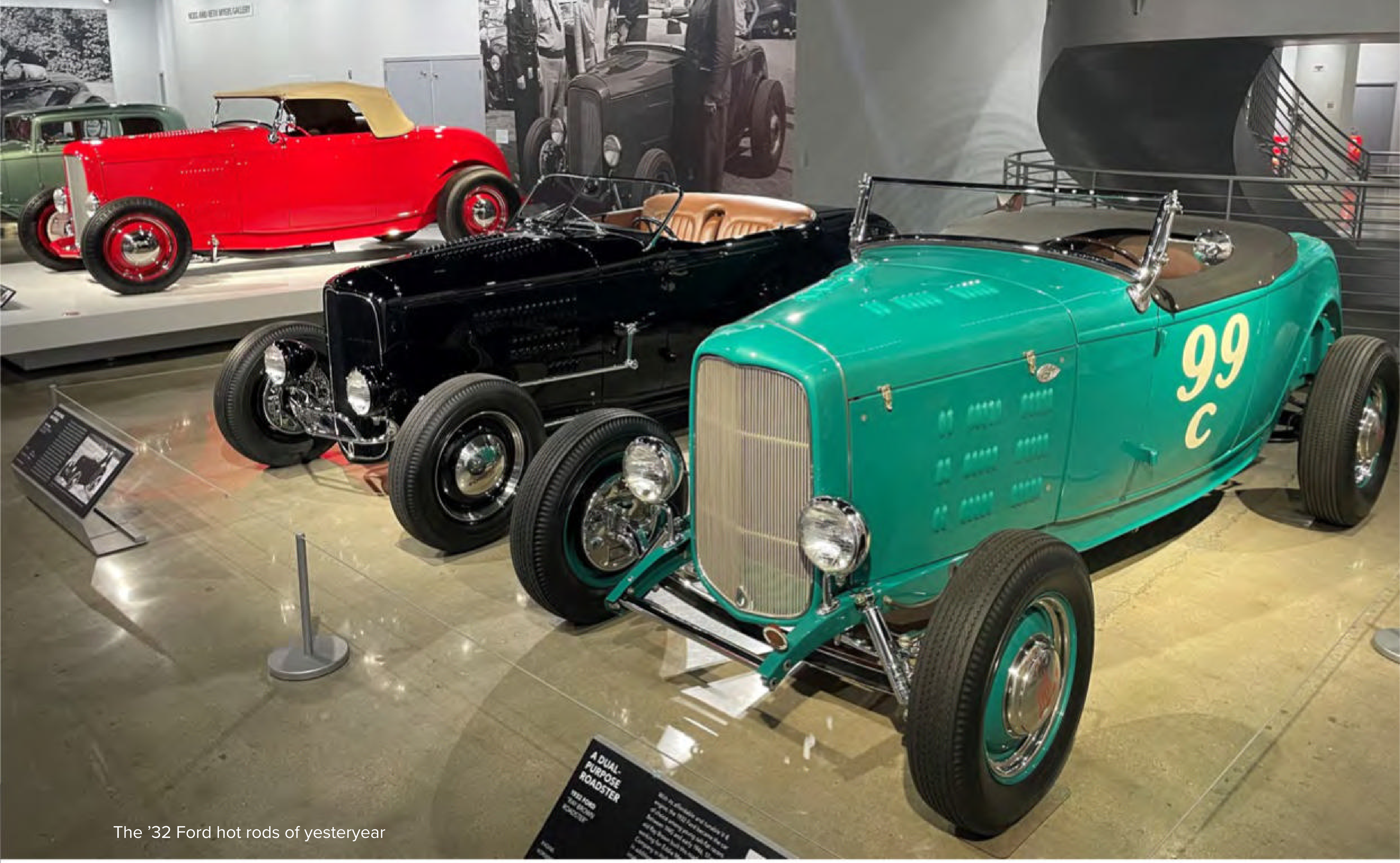
On our visit, the top floor was populated by vehicles that altered the course of vehicle design such as the Jaguar E-Type and the Bugatti Atalante, and vehicles by designers who challenged the industry such as Brooks Stevens and Preston Tucker. Adjacent was a large display of vehicles made famous by television and movies such as the *Back to the Future* DeLorean, the Ford Torino of *Starsky & Hutch*, the Ectomobile Cadillac ambulance from *Ghostbusters*, a life-size Lightning McQueen, and 'Eleanor' from *Gone in 60 Seconds*.

Walking down the staircase to level two, we were greeted by an exhibit on small electric vehicles from all over the world, some older and some more recent. The newest was the latest incarnation of the Meyers Manx Beach Buggy, featuring a new shape and design — the company's first in 50 years — and an all-electric power plant. The shape of things to come for the off-road fraternity?

Starsky & Hutch Ford Torino

Ghostbusters Ectomobile


1939 Bugatti Type 57C Atalante



The ’32 Ford hot rods of yesteryear

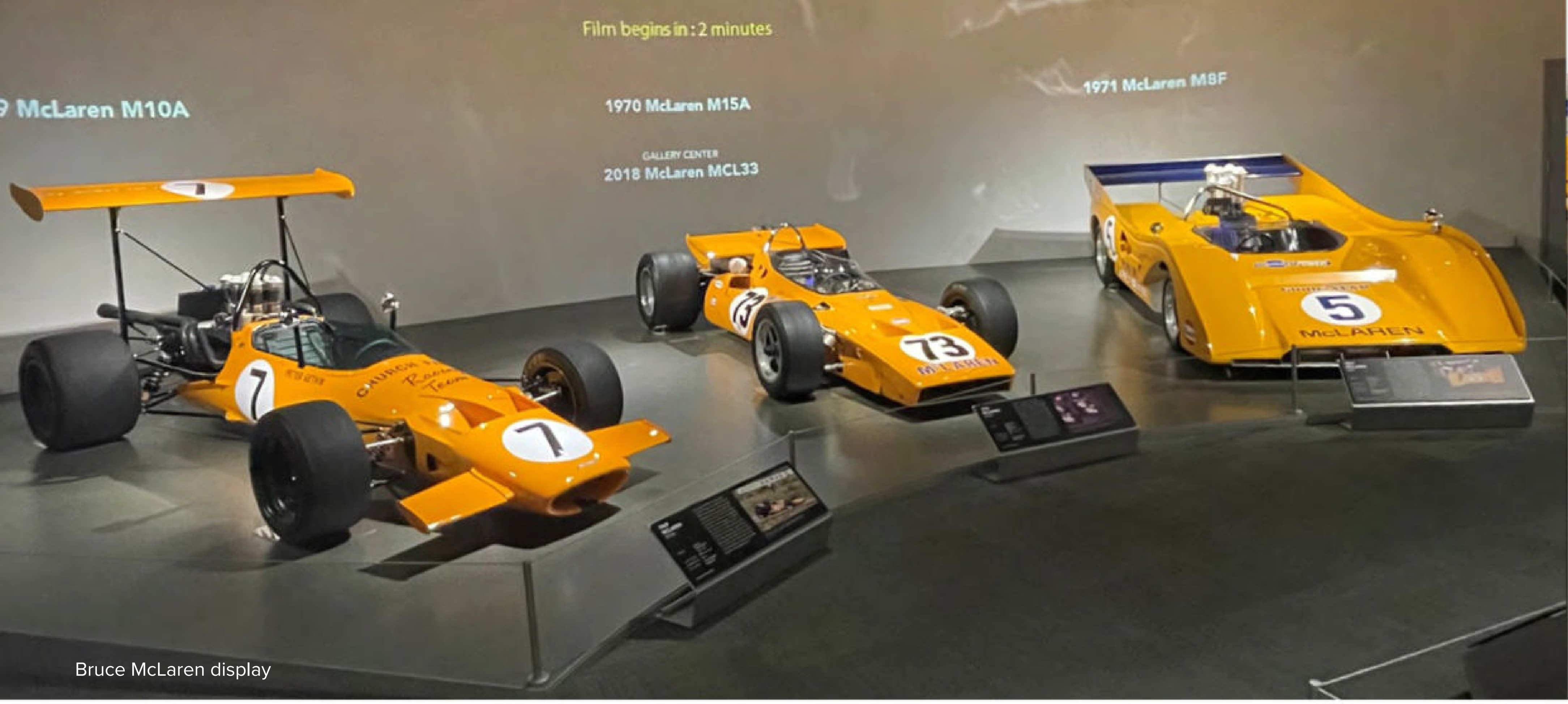
HOT ROD HISTORY

Further into level two was a large display on the 1932 Ford and its myriad incarnations. This was the car that helped create the hot rod scene that was so central to the creation of California’s custom car scene after World War II. Numerous versions were beautifully displayed, along with the history of the vehicle and how it came to be so popular in the 1950s and right up to today. The museum chose to feature the vehicle last year, as it was 90 years old in 2022. Some of the vehicles on display were the actual original ’32s that broke new ground back in the 1950s and 1960s, lovingly restored to their former modified glory.

2020 Ferrari FXX-K Evo

2010 Pagani Zonda Tricolore

Adjacent was another display on low-production high-performance cars, many of which I had never heard of. But then I didn’t mix in the same circles as the Sultan of Brunei or similar, who received the invitations to purchase. Vehicles included the Pagani Zonda Tricolore, a Hyperion XP-1, and a 2020 Ferrari FXX-K Evo. These beautiful and often very long sports and touring cars were amazing, each on a pedestal enabling visitors to walk around and lust after the vehicles that proclaimed their owners as something beyond mere mortals. →



Bruce McLaren display

MCLAREN MECCA

Motorcycles also dominated much of level two, with numerous models of all types that went well over my head and level of interest. I was too busy heading to a smaller room titled ‘The Color of Success: McLaren’s Papaya Livery’. Inside were nine classic McLaren race cars, all resplendent in bright papaya orange, the cars on angled plinths displayed in a fan shape rising to the rear, with a 10th car in the middle.

The histories of the man and the marque, particularly their success in racing, adorned signage sympathetically placed not to be in the way of the vehicles. It was difficult to describe the pride I felt as a New Zealander in the room that day.

However, it was the ground floor that I couldn’t wait to get to. In the main room, which I estimated to be 1000m^2, was a display on vehicles and boats used in James Bond films since the original *Dr No* in 1962. I was in Bond heaven. They had vehicles from all the films and all the actors who had played 007.

They had a version of the most famous of all Bond cars — the DB5 — complete with its various gadgets. Also on display was the original Mercury Cougar XR7 from *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, the 1971 Mach 1 Mustang from *Diamonds Are Forever* and the 1974 AMC Hornet X from *The Man With the Golden Gun*. In that film, Roger Moore (apparently) jumped the car across a river that spiralled about its own axis — quite a stunt, particularly for a Hornet.

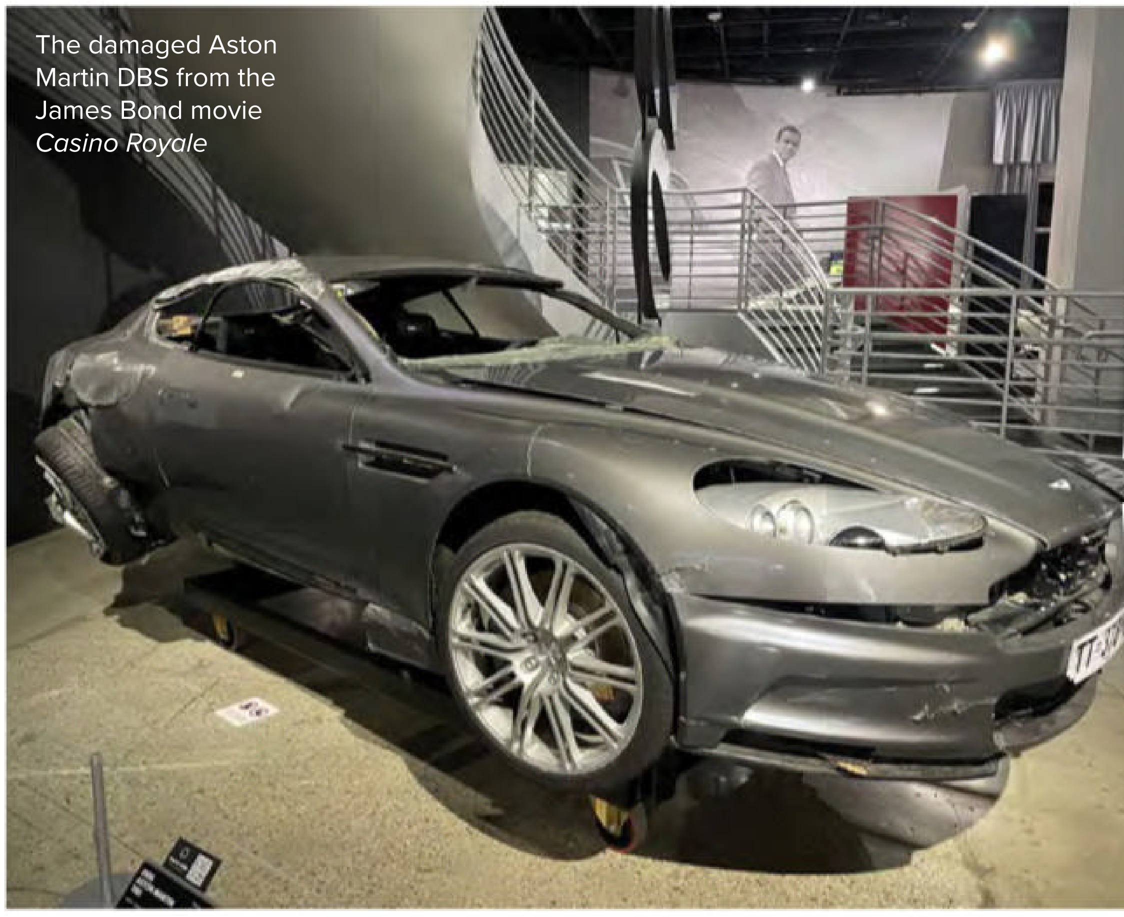
1972 McLaren M20
1972 McLaren M8F/P
1973 McLaren M16C

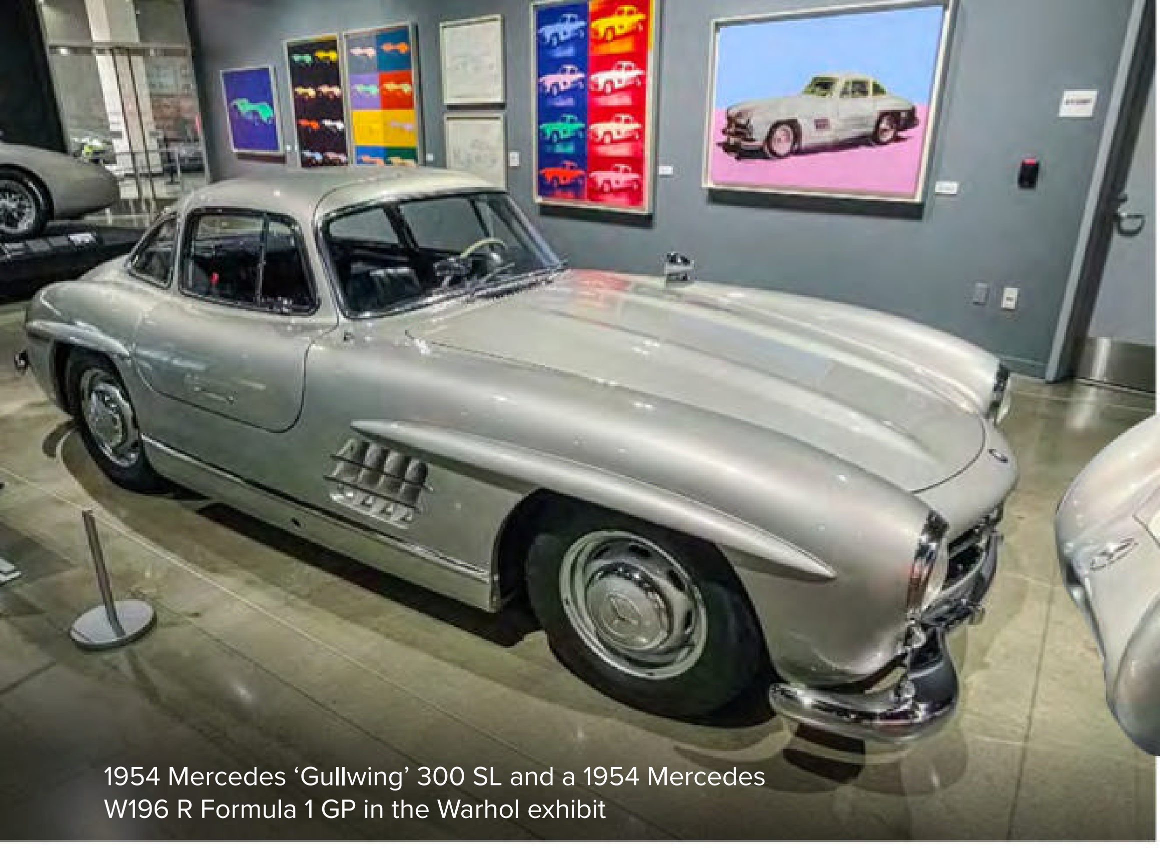
They also had the Lotus Esprit that turned into a submarine in the movie *The Spy Who Loved Me*. It was one of the most desirable Corgi car models when I was growing up. Known also by the name 'Wet Nellie', the one on display was one of seven produced for the film.

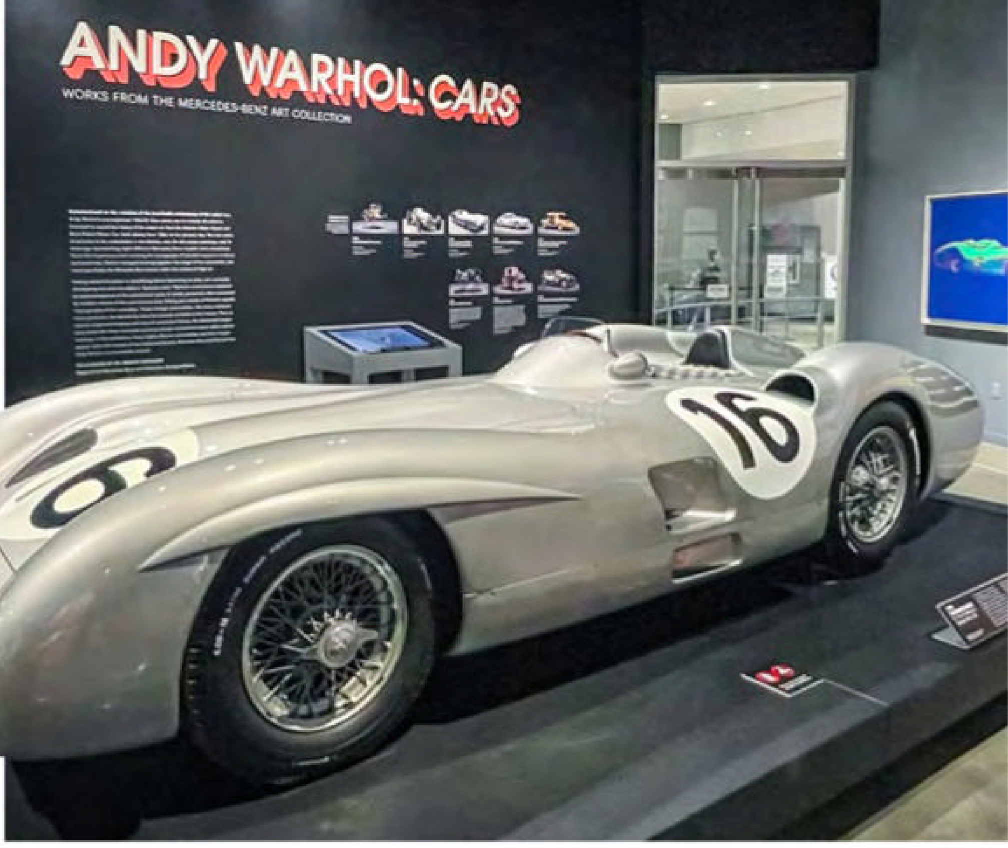
RECORD ROLL

Possibly my favourite Bond film is *Casino Royale*, which was Daniel Craig's first foray into the role. In the movie, there is a scene at night when Bond, travelling at high speed in his DBS, spots girlfriend Vesper Lynd tied up on the road ahead. To avoid her, Bond jerks the steering wheel, rolling the precious Aston over and over, and over.

I remember seeing a documentary in which they explained this stunt and the difficulty they had in persuading the →


The damaged Aston Martin DBS from the James Bond movie *Casino Royale*





1954 Mercedes 'Gullwing' 300 SL and a 1954 Mercedes W196 R Formula 1 GP in the Warhol exhibit

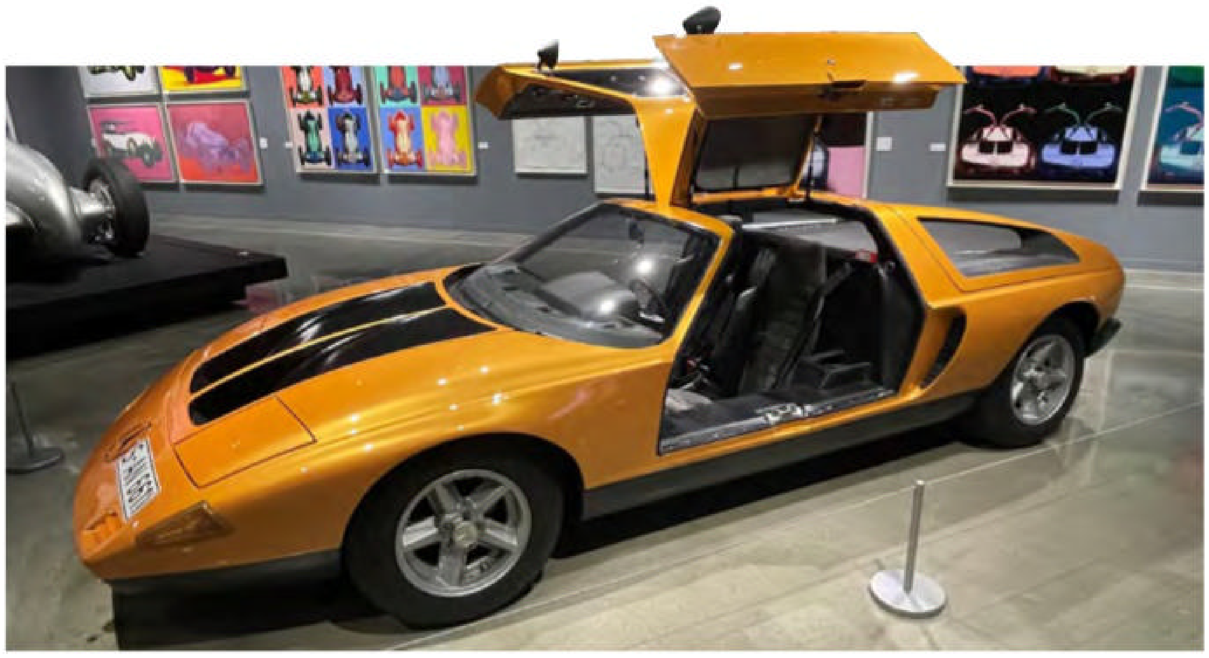
Aston Martin to roll, given its excellent road manners. Finally, they installed a ram that punched through a hole in the floor on cue from a technician holding a remote control. The ram hit the road, which forced the car, travelling at a fair rate of knots, into a series of 'cannon rolls', which is rolling over and over rather than end over end. This stunt produced seven rolls, setting a Guinness World Record.

The car used for the stunt was part of the exhibit. It looked the worse for wear but perhaps not as terrible as you would think for something subjected to such a tumultuous insult.

Lastly, there was an exhibit on the artwork of Andy Warhol and, more specifically, on Mercedes vehicles. Andy had a close association with Mercedes and copies of various artworks were on display along with a number of rare Mercedes cars. These included a 1954 Formula 1 GP car and a 1970 experimental C111 — cars that are virtually impossible to see anywhere else. This one was fitted with a V8 rather than a Wankel rotary.

Afterwards, contemplating the museum on the long flight home, I marvelled at how the Petersen had become one of the best automobile museums in the world in less than three decades. It has set the bar for insightful and beautiful ways of presenting its vehicular exhibits. It captures the history, the beauty, and the intricacy of the automobiles and crafts an enthralling theatre of information and beauty for visitors' delectation.

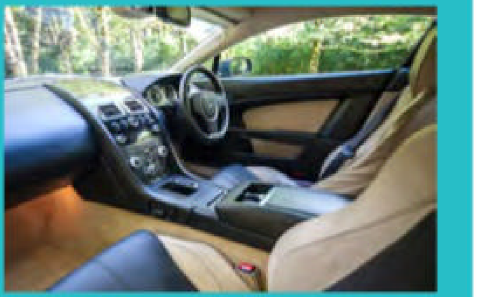
Even if you are not an avid car person and see the automobile as little more than a convenience, this museum will surely capture your interest and awaken at least some perception of why so many people find cars so richly rewarding and interesting. ■



$79,990

2009 ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE

53,500km, 4.7 Litre V8 Coupe, 6 Speed SpeedShift



Beautiful second Gen Aston Martin V8 Vantage, with the larger 4.7L engine & clear tail lights. Crystal Key/push button start. The best start into supercar ownership, gorgeous looks, incredible power and simple to maintain.
This car must be seen to be appreciated.

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2012 BMW M5

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The LOST WORLD

Gerard escapes the confines of city life and hits the back-country roads on a mission to find wrecks, rest, and spiritual restoration — in Dargaville

By Gerard Richards

You can feel it winding up, many weeks out. You're running around like a headless chook, making the rounds in the urban jungle, just trying to keep it all on track. Ensnared in a demented frenzy, you're cranked as tight as your mother-in-law's frozen smile. It hits you like a thunderbolt: you need to get outta here, escape, run like dogs into the back country, get a taste of the open road, the wind in your face, and some small-town chilled time.

"You better get back, honky cat / Better get back to the woods / Living in the city isn't where it's at … / It's like trying to drink whisky from a bottle of wine". Thank you, Elton John.

Don't all blokes have a hankering to smash the shackles and high-tail it out of the city, on a road trip to some rural bolt hole? This was the general scenario that gripped me a few weeks back. Being a mature male, in years at least, I have a deep passion for nostalgic or retro automobiles and roadside landmarks. An excursion off the beaten track into the heartland on a quest — hunting down these remaining signposts to our past — seemed compulsory at this moment.

1953 Chevrolet in paddock,
Dargaville, 2008

Above: The shell and not much else of a 1960s International truck in a junk and recycling yard in Dargaville, 2014

Below: The Northern Wairoa Hotel — hub of operations from my second-floor street-front room, Dargaville, 2008

NORTHERN WAIROA HOTEL

SPIRITUAL CALLING

Decision made, brain cells lit up like a neon Vegas Strip joint sign, the spiritual calling led me to — Dargaville! I needed to prepare carefully for a mission of such gravity and risk into the depths of Kaipara country.

The nerve centre of operations was critical, and I booked early into the grand, atmosphere-drenched Northern Wairoa Hotel (1918), on the main drag in Dargaville. I insisted that my room be strategically located above the main street so that I could keep an eye on the late-night shenanigans erupting from the bar and any hooning up and down the strip. Vital, you understand, in gauging the flavour of the town.

Cameras were checked, loaded, and charged. Capturing the essence of the journey in images of the retro auto and architectural relics of a bygone era was the challenge.

Suitable refreshment was on the non-negotiable list, essential to maintain the cosmic soft-focus zone, helping to open new vistas of perspective through the viewfinder. It would be a sacrifice for art's sake that I was prepared to make, although no mood-enhancing juice was consumed while riding the roads, as I am a responsible Kiwi bloke. →

Northern Wairoa Hotel

Strategic view from my hub of operations — my room at the Northern Wairoa Hotel — with commanding view of the main street, 2013

Another ingredient that required some thought was clothing. Blending in with the natives and not drawing attention to me being another bloody Jaffa (Aucklander) on the loose contained an element of self-preservation. This was not the least of my concerns, I can assure you, as I planned to indulge in a little trespassing on private property, if required, to nail the picture.

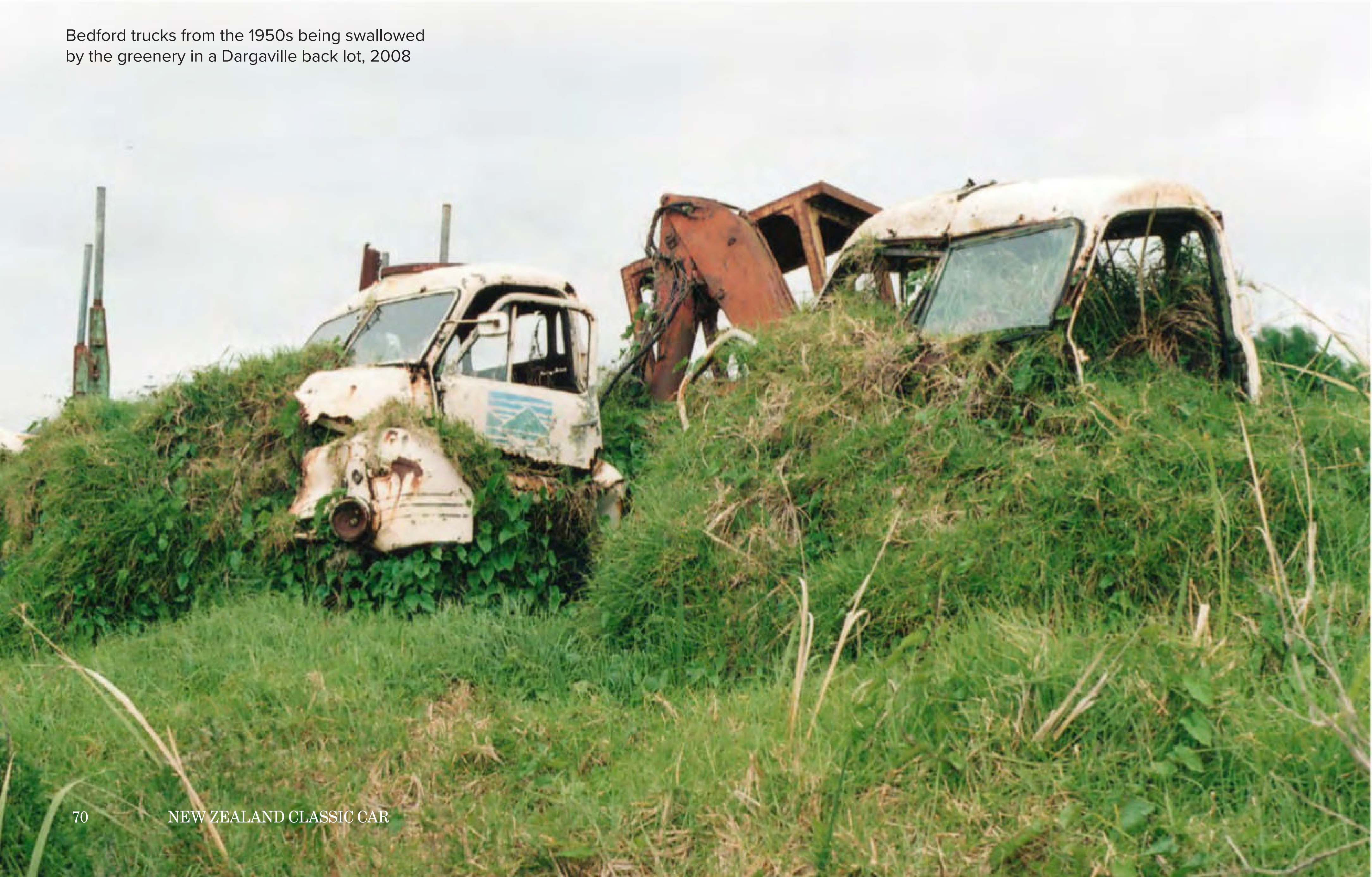
> There are some real gems, like the authentic Colonial Hotel and in particular the lovely Northern Wairoa Hotel (1918)

JUXTAPOSITION

My weekend started at sparrow's fart, transporting partner and her daughter for a 5.30am check-in at a frantic madhouse — Auckland Airport. They were off on a girl's shopping junket to Sydney. I was rather pleased to be a non-participant on that cackle-ridden sortie. But it was an interesting juxtaposition to be heading out the road from that predawn bustling chaos to the wide, open spaces, sparsely furnished with humanity, of the famed kūmara country.

The machinery at my disposal for this epic trip might not send your pulse into warp-factor overload, but my trusty classic Toyota Corolla has been described in certain quarters as the best-engineered automobile on the planet. I can hear you all restraining your envy with little difficulty, but what better machine than this Model T of the new millennium to tackle a journey of such import?

Bedford trucks from the 1950s being swallowed by the greenery in a Dargaville back lot, 2008



Right: Throne chairs with portrait of Royals above, Northern Wairoa Hotel, Dargaville, 2014

Once off the main juggernaut route at Brynderwyn and being waylaid only for a couple of pit stops at retro junk shops — exercising massive discipline here — and for fuel, I entered another time frame in a few short miles. It was like re-entry into another galaxy, sort of 'back to the future to 40 years earlier'. This was what I had come for, and I have to say it felt damn good.

Through Maungaturoto, a quick stop at Matakohe where the Kauri Museum is located, then on to Paparoa, for a wind-down from the asphalt-ribbon focus. Some munchies and a gander at the amazing antique trader's barn later, and I was back on the black top again. Through Ruawai perched on the shores of the Kaipara Harbour, then along the kūmara plantation straights, I homed in on the metropolis of Dargaville.

Cruising into town on a sunny Friday arvo, the long weekend stretching ahead of me, I sensed an undercurrent of excitement and anticipation. The wide streets gave a sense of spaciousness and the flavour of a community living outside the mainstream — a frontier feeling.

The river exudes a constant presence and adds a defining flavour to Dargaville. The Wairoa River is a great brooding expanse of water running alongside the town that has played a fundamental role in its lifeblood and character. It still does.

DRENCHED IN CHARACTER

The town is summed up in the phrase 'what you see is what you get'. There is no thin tourist veneer as is laid over formula resort places like Rotorua, Taupō, or Queenstown, but it was drenched in character. The buildings here have a rough-hewn and unkempt →

Bedford historic tow truck from the 1940s, still in original condition behind Dargaville removal company, 2014

CRASH-REPAIRS

Jaguars, Triumphs, and Rovers in compound in Dargaville, 2008

Ford Falcon XW 1969–'70 shell, with some interior left, in Dargaville junk and recycling yard, 2008

MOTOR ENGINEER
ALL CLASSES OF MOTOR
Castrol
Castrol

Garage of Nick Puharich Motor Engineer around the late 1950s or early '60s (photo: copied by Gerard Richards from Dargaville Museum Collection)

original integrity. There are some real gems, like the authentic Colonial Hotel and, in particular, the aforementioned lovely Northern Wairoa Hotel (1918), where I was to be hanging out for the next couple of days. There's a great curving balustrade to the staircase, stylish open beam ceilings, and evocative woodwork, which all lend an ornate charm and regal air to the establishment.

Speaking of regal, one highly bizarre touch that cracked me up were the two throne-like chairs taking pride of place at the top of the grand staircase, with a portrait of the Queen and Prince Phillip perched above them. How retro can you get?!

> It was like re-entry into another galaxy, sort of 'back to the future to 40 years earlier'

Once the formalities of checking in had been concluded, I returned to the street. Being a petrolhead of old, my eye quickly focused on the array of vehicular machinery on display. It didn't take long to conclude that the town was littered with variants of the four-wheel-drive type but with a major difference to their usual appearance: most of them were legitimately carrying out the business for which they were designed, carting fence posts and the like. This is different to the role assigned to their Auckland counterparts, which appears to be ferrying the kids in a kind of road-legal armoured car, to Dio, St Cuthbert's, King's College, or other centres of learning. What's more, there were no pretentious Porsche, BMW, Audi, or VW Remuera tractors to be seen here — just your good, honest, hardworking 'Crumpy'-style Toyotas, Fords, and the odd Chevrolet 4WD.

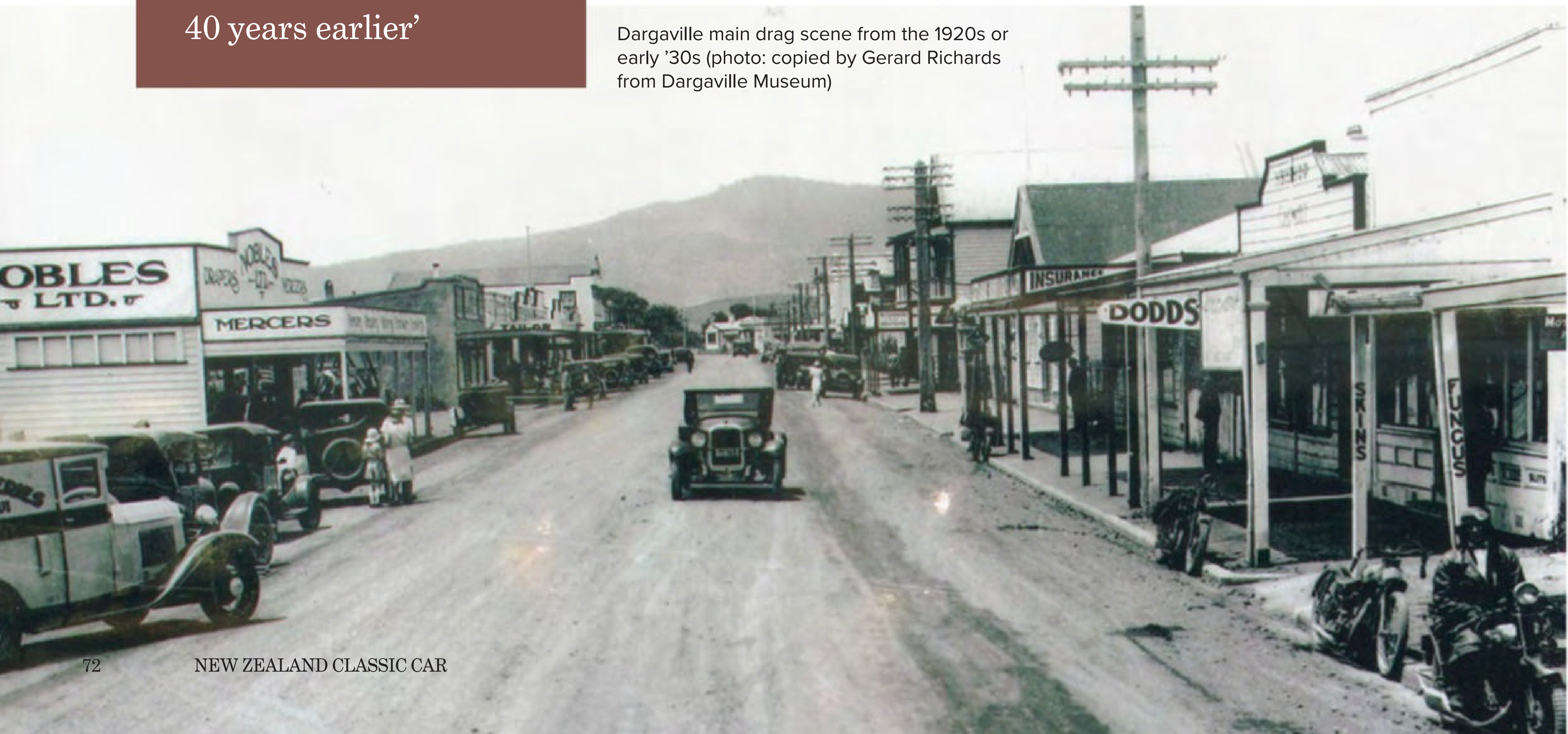
EVER DECREASING CIRCLES

Among the usual flotsam of vehicles was the inevitable outlaw youth fringe, with their motley collection of pseudo-rebel machinery. Given the tiny parameters of the cruising strip of the main drag, the protagonists in the usual range of suspects — Lancer Evos, Subaru WRXs, Legacies, Silvias, and so on — rapidly became irritatingly familiar.

Riding in what felt like ever decreasing circles, the incumbents strove to strike some serious anti-establishment attitude. In their muscular autos, they quickly became a noisy and rather pathetic — though slightly fascinating — contradiction of a young man's delusion of mana.

Gauging the level of enthusiasm exhibited by their female window dressing was the acid test. The boredom evident in perhaps the 10th reconnaissance of town, indicated that this display activity wasn't exactly captivating their women. Eventually, their 'disturbing the peace' presence, abetted by their noisy exhaust, boom-box sound systems, and blow-off valves, finally dispersed as they went in search of a petrol station, a beer, or something stronger. I correctly assumed we hadn't seen the last of them. →

Dargaville main drag scene from the 1920s or early '30s (photo: copied by Gerard Richards from Dargaville Museum)



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Reasonably complete early ’60s Hillman Minx, in Dargaville junk and recycling yard, 2008

RUAWAI Café

Old Innes Tartan Juicy logo, still on long-defunct Ruawai Café door, Dargaville, 1984

Dargaville Post Office built in 1914

Above: Bedford truck TK-model cabs from the late ’60s and ’70s in Dargaville back lot, 2008

Below: Holden HK Kingswood 1968 model station wagon, spotted in a Dargaville junk and recycling yard in 2008

UNDERCURRENT OF CARE

Wandering down the main street observing and eavesdropping on the natives, it was clear that this town cultivated something quite different to the no-time-to-talk isolationists generated in the hustle and bustle of the big city. There is something more real here. People greet each other, stop and inquire about their respective well-being. Amazing. This was quite a revelation, coming under that endangered activity called ‘building community’. I sensed an undercurrent of care among the locals — more than you would ever find among the trendy tribes and slick dialogue you encounter cruising the pavements of Ponsonby Road.

Overheard conversation was of the ‘how are the jams and preserves coming along for the church fair?’ and ‘did you know Mrs Smith’s daughter was seen with one of those Jones boys, necking at the tennis club?’ kind of fare. Not earth-shaking stuff for sure, but there was a cloak of caring and belonging.

But then, who’s to say the debates over the latest $250 hair ‘makeover’ or the merits of the latest essential fashion item and trends for the coming Auckland season have any less substance in the end?

Inevitably, there’s a dark underbelly to the cosy community exterior that lurks around the town, but the north doesn’t have an exclusive mortgage on this.

Above: Demise of classic Japanese Mitsubishi GTO coupé in a Dargaville back lot, 2014

With my own belly zeroing in on empty after the wee small hours kick-off, I powered through some greasies and repaired back to my hub of operations at the Northern Wairoa.

I was about to sign off for the night when of course the band/disco directly below me chose the moment to crank up. Actually, it wasn't that bad; they played good music, well, stuff that I knew. Two hours later, they pulled the plug, the bar closed, and you could spray a whole AK47 magazine around on the street below and not hit a soul. Yes, the town was closed down for night at 11pm, except for the occasional pesky drone of the remnant boy-racer brigade.

COFFEE?

Saturday morning. To an Aucklander, getting their fix of a good brew verges on desperation. It's obvious to all inhabitants that getting the first critical caffeine hit is the vital ingredient in coping with the madhouse of Auckland life. Whether you plan an early visit among the shoals of leotard-clad nymphs to the gym, a fractious supermarket expedition, or signalling $@#%$* to a slow sedan holding up your 4WD, good coffee is the essential pump.

Following a crack-of-dawn start for my photographic ventures, I was on the prowl for the black gold. To my very deep dismay, the only café in town making the real deal was closed for renovation. My faith in the ability of the small-town ambience to provide for my wants was shaken at this major crisis. A further scouring of the back streets proved fruitless. I settled for semi-stewed filtered coffee and greasy fry up, big on quantity but short on, well, I probably shouldn't go there.

I returned, fortified, to the pad and gathered my image-recording devices for the much-anticipated derelict car hunt around the fringes of town. →

Following a crack-of-dawn start for my photographic ventures, I was on the prowl for the black gold

Morris Minor 'last rites', in vacant lot behind several businesses in Dargaville, 2014

Below: 1950s Ford Prefect in Dargaville junk and recycling yard, 2008

Right: Mitsubishi Sigma from the early 1980s, possibly losing the termite battle, snapped in a back industrial estate, Dargaville, 2008

HITTING PAYDIRT

I was gobsmacked. Down the first back road and a short stone's throw across a paddock I found a rotting '53 Chevrolet. How lucky is that?! I've been on many of these capers before and one can go days without seeing anything to quicken the pulse. To the wrecked-car-hunting junkie, this was paydirt. Almost unbelievably, it got even better.

Armed with my cameras, I was checking the set-up for my fully intended trespassing mission onto private land (the hazards of this activity are often extreme, barbed wire and drooling mongrels with a heightened sense of purpose looming large among them) when along the road saunters the owner. Seeing my interest, he casually unlocked the gate and ushered me through. My irritation with the dodgy coffee and breakfast fast receding, I soaked up this piece of our automotive heritage, which had come to rest in this backroads paddock on the edge of town. After scrutinising it intently and sussing out the best camera angles, I burned through a serious chunk of the memory card, plus half a roll of traditional film. The opportunity to capture this iconic scene had to be taken fully.

> The cars are original in their decay, a reminder of the terminal nature of the vehicle and its incumbents on this human highway

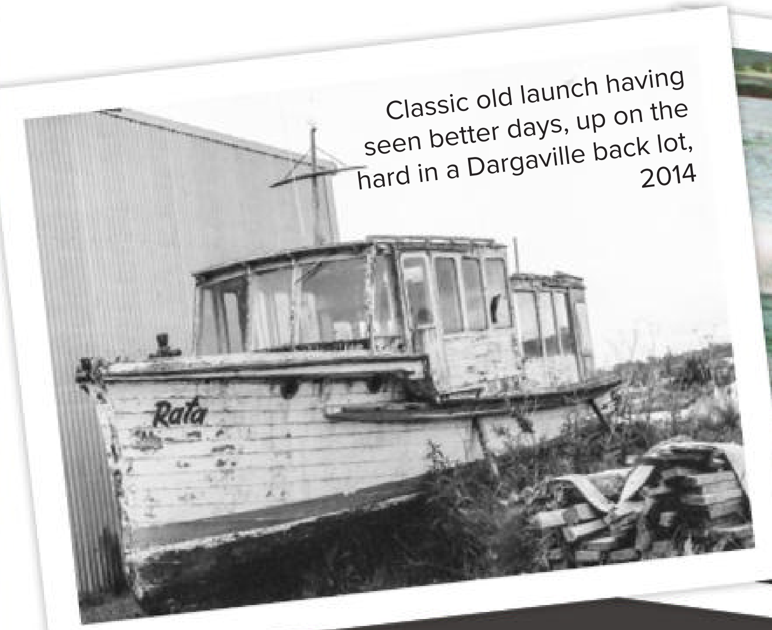
My luck continued to hold. While walking back to the Toyota parked in a desolate adjacent truck stop, I spied another few intriguing retro automotive casualties lurking among the industrial debris. Scouring the yard thoroughly revealed highlights including a complete '66 Vauxhall Cresta, some good Morries, a fairly trashed '64 AP5 Valiant, a '68 Kingswood wagon, and a '64 Hillman Minx, all in varying states of dilapidation.

By this time, I was floating in a realm of ecstatic derelict automotive heaven. Walking on water even seemed feasible, so light was my mood. Wisely, I decided to anchor the brain in a more one-dimensional mode before cruising on in the Corolla. It's hard to explain to the uninitiated the rush that uncovering old automotive relics unleashes. I guess it's some sort of link to a bygone era, plus the fascination of corrosion — the ravages of the elements, plus time, reducing even sheet metal to remnant memories of its former self. The cars are original in their decay, a reminder of the terminal nature of the vehicle and its incumbents on this human highway. In that deep philosophic vein, my mind often ponders the lives of the previous custodians of these vehicles — what chaotic capers or lusty times those steel and glass capsules have witnessed.

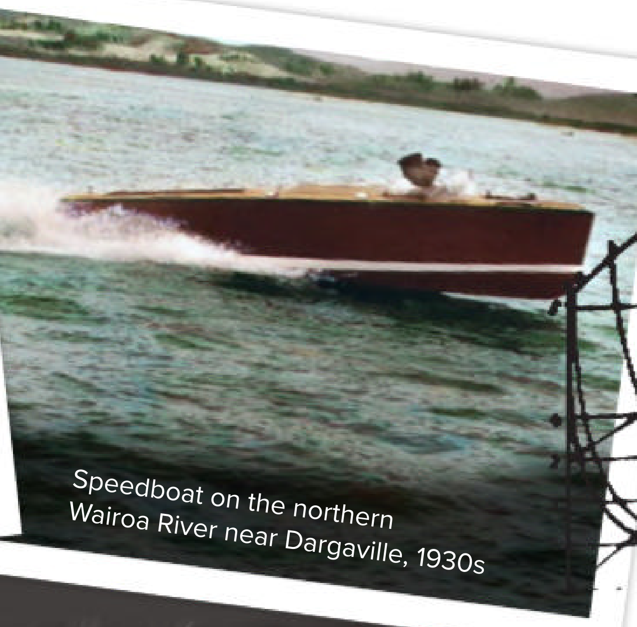
HARBOUR TOWN

As quickly as the muse's touch in sniffing out old antique auto wrecks had visited me, it departed. Apart from a couple more Morries, with more greenery growing in them than in the paddock, and a vintage towie, that was it.

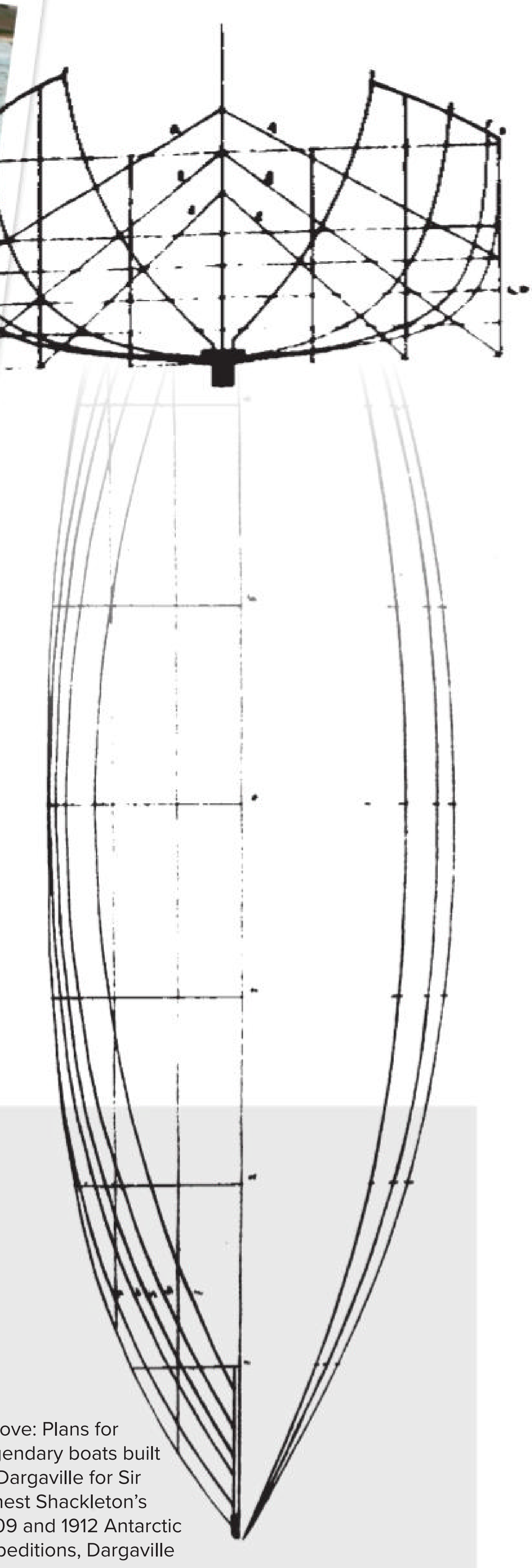
Rear of derelict Vauxhall Cresta PC, Dargaville recycling yard, 2014



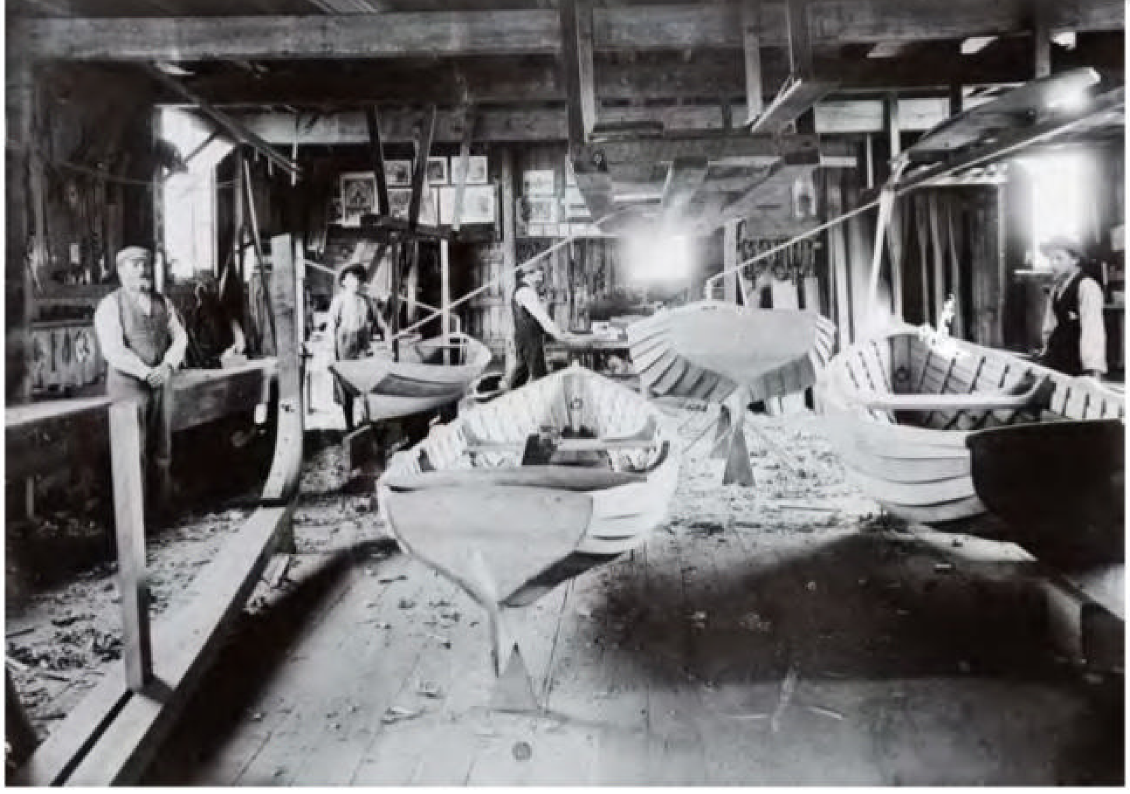
Classic old launch having seen better days, up on the hard in a Dargaville back lot, 2014



Speedboat on the northern Wairoa River near Dargaville, 1930s



Above: Plans for legendary boats built in Dargaville for Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1909 and 1912 Antarctic expeditions, Dargaville Museum



Kauri lifeboats under construction for Ernest Shackleton's Nimrod Expedition (1907–'09)

I checked out the Dargaville Museum later in the afternoon, hoping to learn more of the town's maritime history. The Kaipara Harbour and Wairoa River were vital links for both commerce and personal transport in the district's early days. Gum digging and kauri logging were the prime industries, and the waterways were the number-one mode of ferrying goods. There was also a daily passenger service to Helensville in the height of the era.

I also had aspirations of finding documentation on recreational boating, in particular powerboat or hydroplane racing in the estuaries around the harbour. I'd stumbled across some evocative pics from the early '60s a few years back and, well, you know, the flaming petrolhead in me is hard to douse. Alas, there was hardly anything in this vein. While it probably is a good regional museum in the traditional sense, I departed a bit disappointed in the maritime set-up.

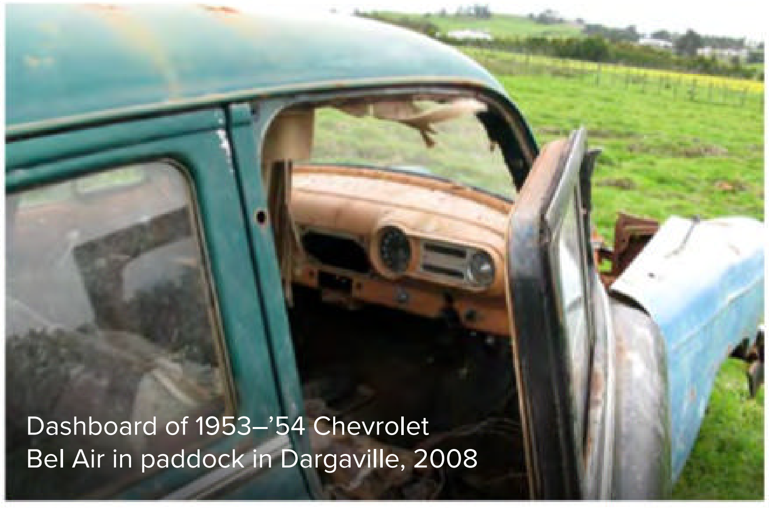
I awoke early from a deep sleep, in the hallowed halls of the regal hotel. It had been a quiet Saturday night in the entertainment nerve centre of Dargaville. No band and the mecca of the street-front pokies bar seemed to have barred the doors around 10-ish. Even the outlaw rebel brigade of would-be boy racers had dispersed for the greener pastures of the party circuit at an indecently early hour. The town sank into silence. Sleep seemed a good option.

I decided that I had to return to have a gander at the '53 Chev, in the early morning light. I fought this craving valiantly, but it was a lost cause. Addiction is addiction — why fight it? You sell it to yourself anyway you can. My pitch was, I might get some stunning pics in the soft early morning light.

Back for breakfast in that magnificent ornate time-warp early '20s dining room, I was the only punter on deck and I felt like a king in these majestic surroundings. Nice food and friendly service complimented this esoteric experience. Even the coffee was manageable.

There's something reassuring about a town's main street shopping precinct that remains closed like Fort Knox on a sunny Sunday morning. It seems to suggest that its patrons have activities →

Valiant 1964 in junkyard, Dargaville 2008



Dashboard of 1953–'54 Chevrolet Bel Air in paddock in Dargaville, 2008

Remains of a Mk4 Ford Zephyr in a Dargaville back lot, 2008

of greater substance than a seventh day of rabid consuming to occupy them. I liked this idea a lot, so I didn't want to test it at the local big red shed; I'd rather just not see what could've been seething hordes hunting materialistic conquest inside.

The big box shop aside, I found it deeply reassuring that this town wasn't blighted with the hideous plastic shopping concept of 'the mall' — even if the only reason for this was that it wouldn't make enough of a killing in this small place. The heart of a town lies in the health of the commerce along the main drag and this town had been allowed to retain its nice feel, without a chain store in sight.

LAST DRIVE

It was time to take my leave. As is my custom, after checking out of the elegant Northern Wairoa, I took a last drive around the back streets of town. There was also one last uncompleted spiritual visitation to be made: I am always drawn to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the local stock car racing track in any town that I'm bunking down in.

This has long been a tradition, to park up in the rural countryside and take in the ambience of the local dirt oval. In the quiet wind-blown country flavour of a Sunday morning, the deserted Dargaville Production Stockcar Club track looked crude and roughly hewn. Overgrown grass and weeds were everywhere, it had minimal crowd seating, and only the occasional tatty advertising hoarding suggested even rudimentary operation.

However, that didn't detract from the aura that always hits me: the gladiatorial cauldron of a dirt-track racing arena, no matter what the facilities might be. Young men and not so young men, every season, passionately do battle on this dirt. A display of photos in the window of the recently constructed fibreboard clubhouse was testament to this.

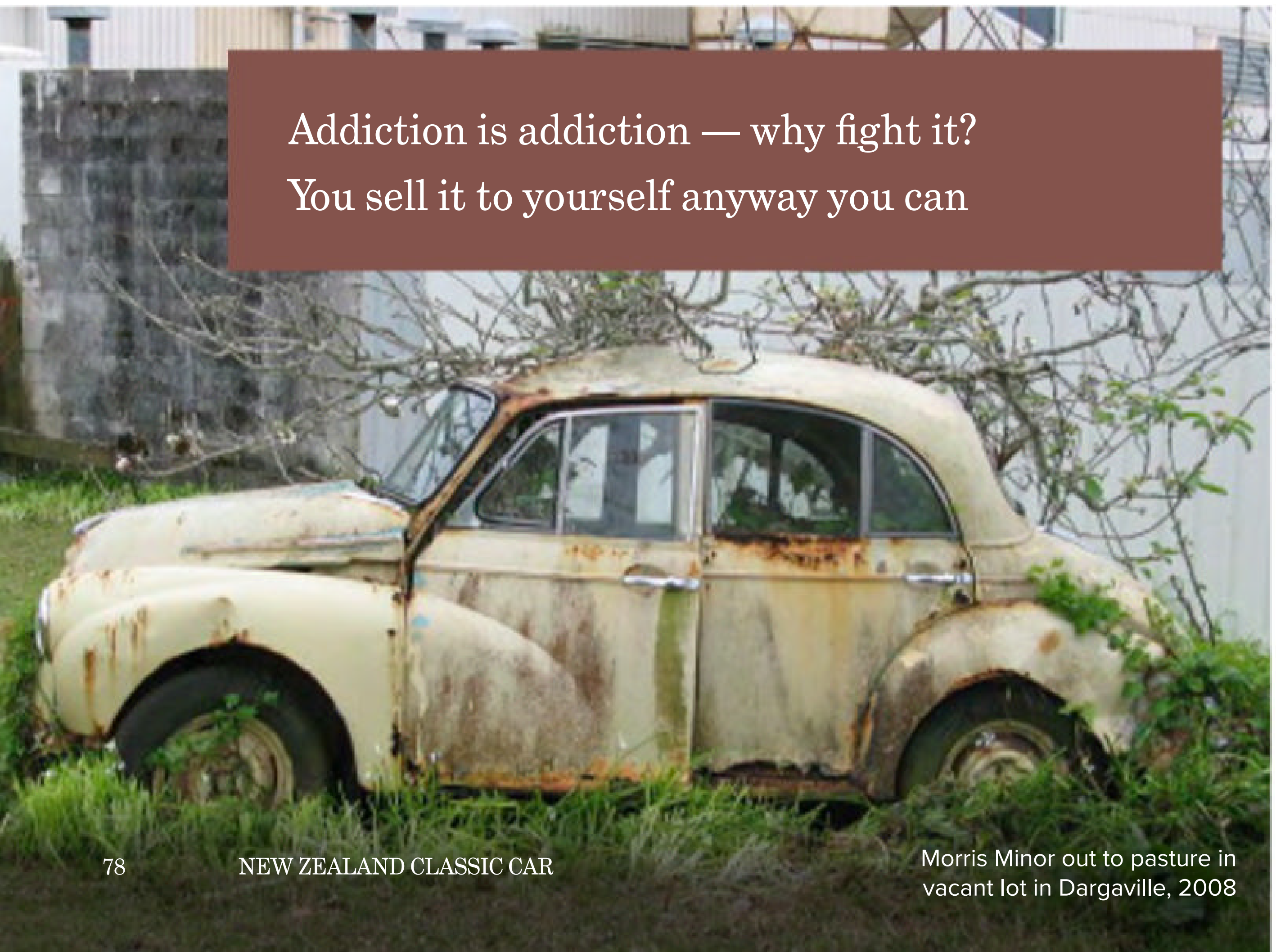
Adjacent, were the headquarters of the Dargaville Rod & Custom Club. Members were arriving as I was departing, carting packs of coldies. The faithful were settling in for an afternoon of big V8 worshipping, watching Bathurst on the box.

I motored away feeling comforted. The grass-roots petrolhead fraternity was in good health here, out on the frontier, in the northern Kaipara.

My long weekend in this Northland backwater had seriously detuned my frenzied brain. I'd briefly switched to country time but, sadly, now, as I pointed the Toyota capsule back to the mother-lode, preparation for re-entry to the madness of the Auckland mosh pit leaked into my serenity.

Then the moment passed. As the pull of urban gravity hurled my Corolla to the vortex of this maelstrom, I felt a calm. The magic of the heartland was riding with me. I knew I could escape again into its off-the-beaten-track charms, whenever I felt a serious calling. ■

> Addiction is addiction — why fight it?
> You sell it to yourself anyway you can



Morris Minor out to pasture in vacant lot in Dargaville, 2008

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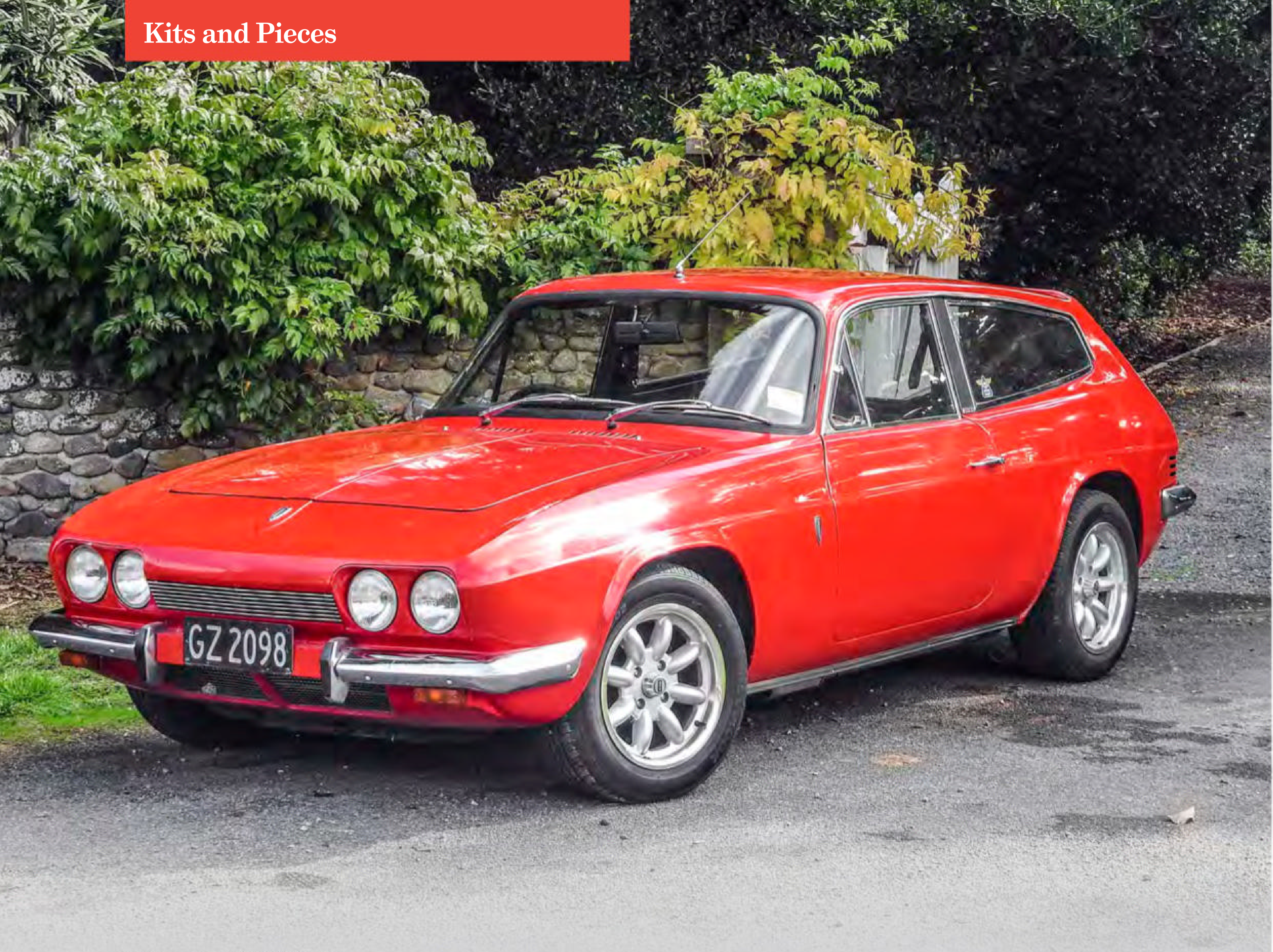


RESTOMODED SCIMITAR

Patrick turns his attention to a fibreglass restomod with a difference while visiting The Pointon Museum in the Wairarapa

Words and photography by Patrick Harlow

Over the years, I have been fortunate to discover several private collections of motorcars. Most of these, although often impressive, are not open to the public, and to see them you often have to know the right person. Fortunately, there are a few collections that advertise their availability on the internet. One particular favourite of mine is The Pointon Museum just east of Masterton in the Wairarapa.

Generally, the museum is open by appointment. The $10 door fee does not cover the cost or even the maintenance of these vehicles, but in my opinion, it is money well spent. Some years ago, I wrote about the

HRH Princess Anne arrives in Staffordshire in her personal GTE

exceptional Tom Morland Firebird kitset car that the museum's owner has in his collection (see *New Zealand Classic Car*, Issue No. 339). This time, I wanted to feature another fibreglass car also in the Pointon shed that is just a little bit different.

When not tinkering with his collection of cars, Francis Pointon runs a garage business from the shed in front of his museum. He is a qualified A-grade mechanic and the car featured here has been subject to quite a bit of his tinkering.

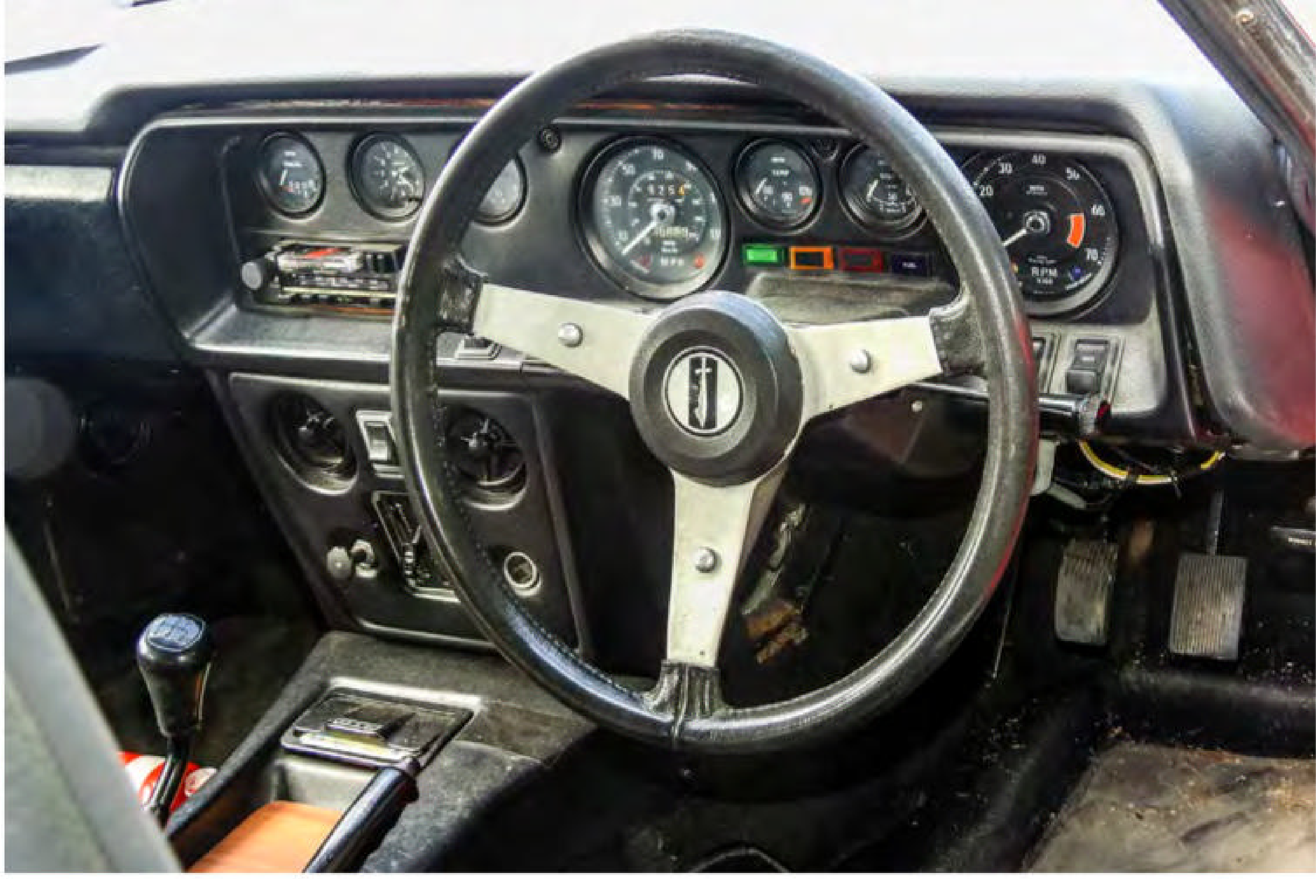
The Ogle-designed Reliant Scimitar GTE is a great car in its own right. It had a long production run stretching from 1968 to 1986 with very few changes, the best of which occurred in 1975 when it was lengthened by 100mm. That gave it more back-seat leg room, making it a genuine four-seater two-door coupé. Just under 10,000 of these sporty fibreglass coupés were made. If you talk to any passionate Scimitar owner, it will not be long before you are being told that HRH Princess Anne owned around six, seven, or maybe eight of these.

A RARE SIGHT

Francis saw his first Scimitar when he was doing his apprenticeship at Fagan Motors, the Ford dealership in Masterton, in the 1970s. Scimitars use a lot of Ford componentry in their running gear so several turned up at Fagan's. Despite having a relatively indestructible fibreglass body, the Scimitar is now a rare sight on New Zealand roads. In the UK, their home country, fewer than 600 still survive.

Francis liked the ageless lines of the Scimitar and had always wanted to own one. In 2011, he bought one that was advertised very cheaply for around $1K, sight unseen. Thinking that it would make a good restoration project, it appealed because it was a four-speed manual with overdrive. However, when he got it home he quickly revised his opinion on its restoration potential. It was and would remain a wreck. The only good parts were the engine and gearbox, which he eventually managed to sell for →

A very British two-door sports estate



$1K, thankfully recouping his costs.

Still, as he was now a fan of the Scimitar, he made contact with the Scimitar Car Club and, through it, managed to procure the red car you see here. The car he bought was a 1973 GTE SE5A powered by a Ford 3.0-litre V6 with a three-speed automatic gearbox. The designation 'SE5A' indicated it was a facelifted derivative of the original SE5 model. With the facelift came a few improvements such as a slightly modified nose. Most of the changes, however, were made inside. The updated interior includes rocker switches to replace the rather more characterful toggle variety. It also included modern warning lights in the cluster, which illuminated for such things as 'radiator cooling fan', 'low disc brake pad level', 'brake fluid level', and 'low fuel'. Very modern for the era.

Francis was not a great fan of automatic cars, so his thoughts drifted from a full restoration to turning it into a car with a classic body that used modern running gear — a 'restomod', in the modern parlance. Initially, he was going to upgrade it with a Rover 3.5-litre V8. Although it's a tight fit, it is an upgrade performed by many other Scimitar owners.

BETTER PERFORMANCE

However, after doing a few measurements, he discovered that he could get better performance out of a Ford 302 (five-litre) V8. Being smaller than the Rover 3.5, the Ford mill would not only be easier to fit but also easier to service once it was in place. If this engine was coupled to a Mustang five-speed gearbox, the drivetrain would actually be 5kg lighter than the Ford V6 drivetrain.

Having decided to go down the restomod route, the new drivetrain option was a no-brainer. With performance in mind, he purchased →

The updated interior includes rocker switches to replace the rather more characterful toggle variety

At one stage, twin headlights were a symbol of a luxury car

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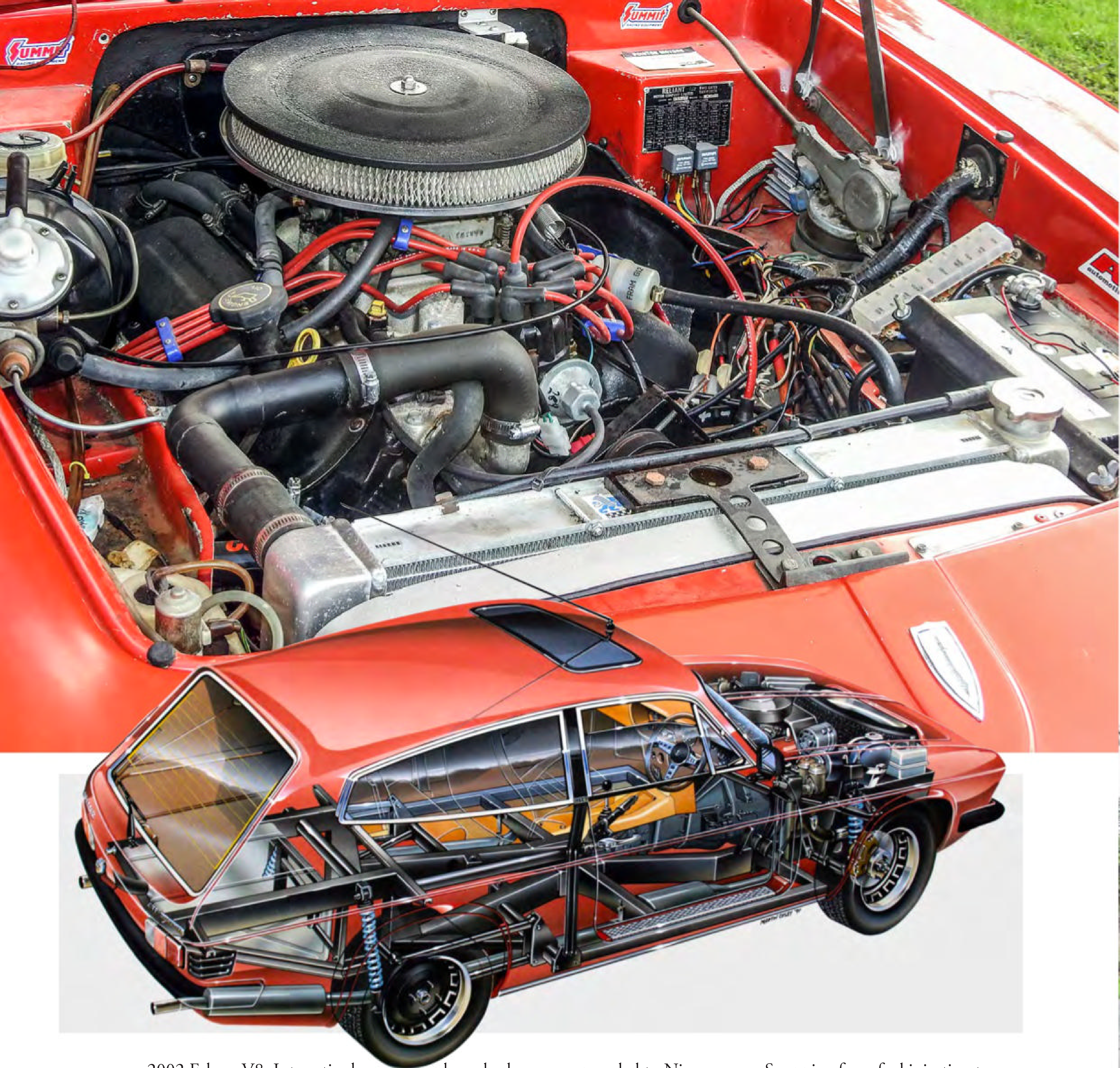

a 2002 Falcon V8. Interestingly, this engine was the last of the Falcon V8 engines. It was hand-built and had the modern GT40 head's roller/rockers. Attached to this was a Mustang bellhousing that included a close-ratio Mustang gearbox. Francis said that the Mustang gearbox and bellhousing were the best bargain of the project. For the rear, a Jaguar XJ12 limited-slip differential was sourced. Interestingly, the internals of the Jaguar and Scimitar are interchangeable.

Naturally, when you add so much power to an older car, it is always a good idea to modify the brakes. The solid front disc-brake unit was upgraded with vented aftermarket Triumph TR6 items and the rear drum brakes were upgraded to Nissan disc brakes. The good thing about both replacement sets of brakes was that they had the same stud patterns as the original Scimitar, so Francis was able to retain the period wheels that came with the car.

Right from the start, Francis knew that fitting the V8 engine and gearbox units was not going to be a simple bolt-on job. The firewall had to be cut slightly to allow the additional length of the V8 to fit. While doing this modification, he decided to swap the Falcon engine's fuel injection to carburetion to reduce the size of the hole that he would have to cut in the firewall. He fitted a Holley 600 carburettor to an aftermarket Edelbrock manifold.

Swapping from fuel injection to a carburettor may sound easy, but when you change one thing, a lot of downstream things need to be changed — such as the fuel pump and distributor. The trickiest job was the alternator. There was no room for the Ford unit or a separate pulley system to rotate it. The solution was to use the flat rib belt pulley used by the water pump. This took a bit of doing, because most alternators use a V-belt. Eventually, Francis found a small Daihatsu alternator that had the right pulley and which could be fitted down low beside the sump. The spare wheel was another casualty, as it no longer fitted under the bonnet. A space-saver was substituted and put in the rear hatch.

EASY ACCESS

One more modification was required to avoid having to take the engine out whenever the spark plugs needed changing. That would be a nuisance. Two additional holes were cut in the firewall and covers were made. Now, when necessary, the back two spark plugs can be accessed from inside the car. Although the weight of the car remained roughly the same, Francis took the opportunity to completely overhaul the front and rear suspension, adding fully adjustable front and rear shocks with Nolathane bushes. In the end, the14-inch wheels were swapped for 15-inch Minilite wheels sourced from Christchurch. As the new wheels raised the height of the car, Francis decided to lower it back to factory specs, which meant changing the springs and the steering angles.

The interior was in pretty good shape, so this was not touched. The entire conversion took just over a year to complete. Like other projects, Francis worked on it mainly during the long winter evenings. →

> It looks very much like any other Scimitar GTE. However, when you turn the ignition and the engine roars into life, the cat leaps out of the bag

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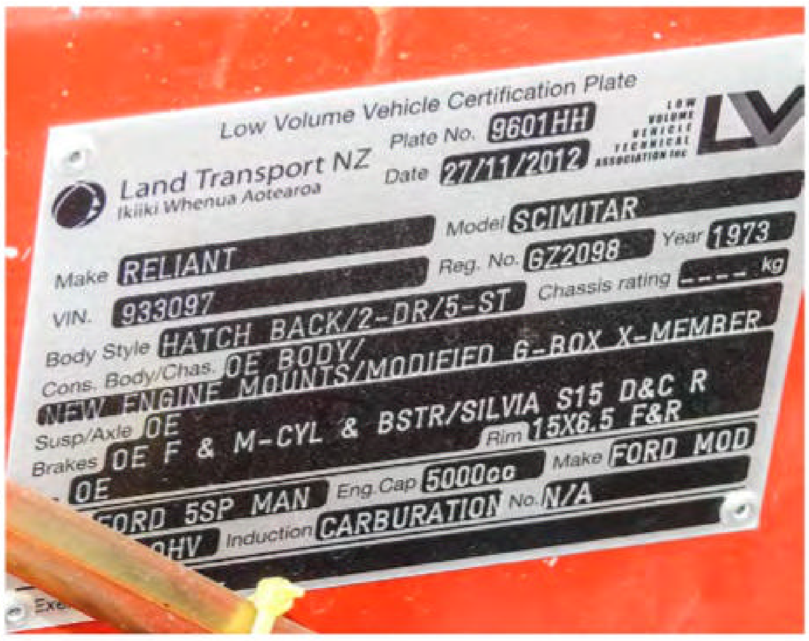
GTE

Fibreglass body ensures this car’s longevity

GTE
SCIMITAR

The Scimitar was one of the earliest British cars to have a hatchback

Fully certified and road legal



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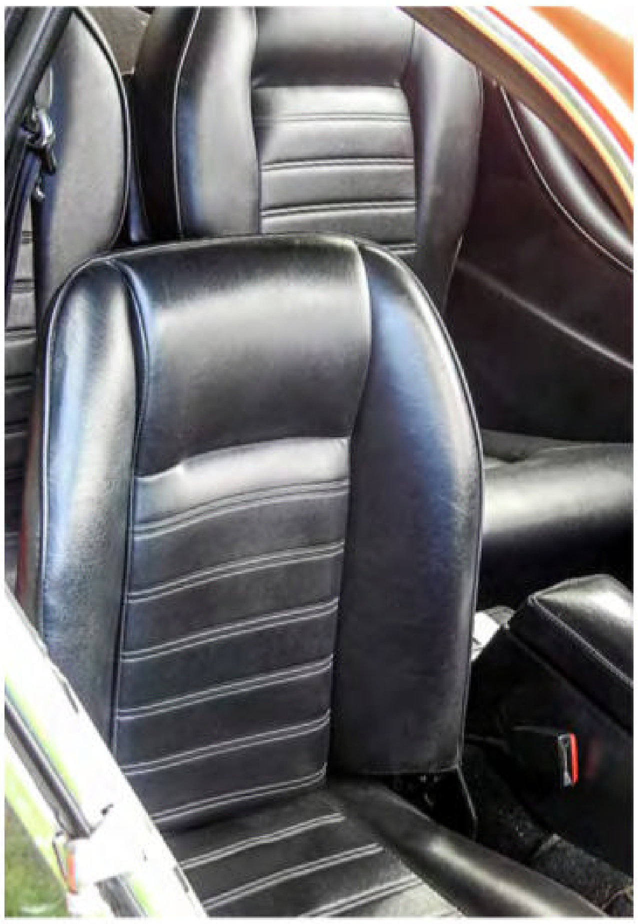

A BEAST

To all intents and purposes, it looks very much like any other Scimitar GTE. However, when you turn the ignition and the engine roars into life, the cat leaps out of the bag — and what a beast it is. The new engine puts out around 175kW, so the rejuvenated car has plenty of get-up-and-go. With a kerb weight of only 1100kg the 3.0-litre Essex V6 was no slouch but that engine tops out at 103kW. Back in the day, that car could crack 100kph in just 8.9 seconds. Francis believes that the repowered car could easily reach the same speed in under five seconds, making it a real street sleeper.

If you mistreat this beast, it will bite you. However, if you drive it with respect to its potential performance, it is a remarkably easy and well-sorted car to drive. Despite it being a bit of a parts-bin special, the car performs exceptionally well. It has unbelievably compliant handling, offering no surprises for the competent driver. Francis says that the only downside of the car is that the position of the steering wheel and seating is suited to a person shorter than 1.8m. It took a bit of getting used to when he first started driving it.

The relatively empty Wairarapa roads are a great place for this car to roam. Francis said that once he decided not to restore it to its original specs, the project was a lot more enjoyable, as he could turn it into the ultimate toy that was, and still is, an absolute joy to drive. ■

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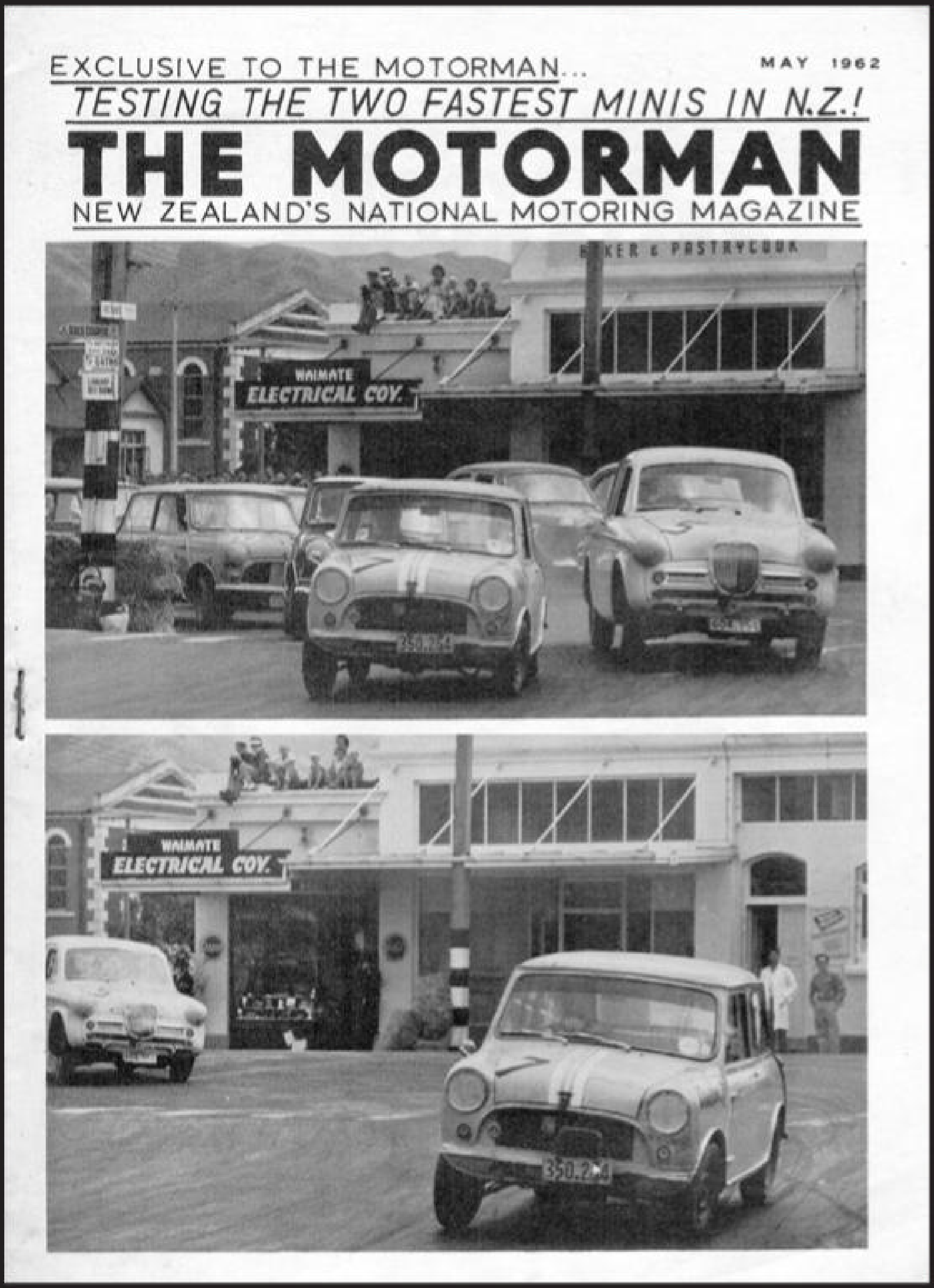
Opening lap and first corner of the saloon car race at the 1962 Waimate street race and the Gordon Miles Austin Mini is immediately into the lead



EXCLUSIVE TO THE MOTORMAN... MAY 1962
TESTING THE TWO FASTEST MINIS IN N.Z.!
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A Miles better Mini

Gordon Miles defied the critics in his unassuming 1960 model Austin Seven Mini, often beating larger, more powerful saloons on local circuits and in hill-climbs. Donn Anderson sat down with him in 1962 to talk about the Miles magic

By Donn Anderson

Gordon Miles was quick to appreciate the great roadholding and handling potential of the torsionally strong original Mini with the sure-footedness of front-wheel drive and sensation of a wheel at each extremity. Yet he also saw the limitations of an 848cc engine developing a modest 34bhp (25kW) in standard trim.

Outwardly, his light blue Mini looked harmless enough, but Gordon somehow extracted significant performance from the BMC baby and, matched to his rather obvious driving skills, the combination was a force to be reckoned with during the 1961/'62 summer motor sport season. The first-generation 997cc Mini Cooper had just been announced in October 1961, and the first three examples to arrive in New Zealand all raced at the 1962 Ardmore Grand Prix (GP) meeting in January.

Local racers were campaigning modified standard Minis and it seemed they were destined to be outclassed by the fully imported Cooper versions. Gordon thought otherwise. He had acquired the Austin Seven Mini in August 1960 and immediately begun preparations for the 1960/'61 season only to find that the standard wheels, which were inclined to fail under competition stress, required upgrading to meet competition standards.

The Pukekohe driver sought the assistance of Formula Junior racer John Histed, Buckler driver Alwyn Marshall, and Ron Wall. They ended up stripping the engines, polishing the crankshaft, lightening the flywheel, and balancing components. The cylinder head was carefully modified and more efficient manifolding was devised. A Speedwell camshaft was imported, as were upgraded clutch springs, Ferodo brake linings, and Michelin radial ply tyres. Seat belts were fitted — a rare addition at the time.

While the car lacked the front disc brakes of the Coopers, Gordon found the harder Ferodo brake linings up to the task of both circuit racing and hill-climbs. Even the most critical observers could not fail to be impressed when the amazingly fast and nimble Mini held off gentleman Ray Archibald's 3.8-litre Jaguar for so long at the 1962 Lady Wigram Trophy meeting.

JOHN
O'GROATS
1965
STROMA ISLAND
LANDS END 874
AUCKLAND N.Z. 13070
ORKNEY &
SHETLAND ISLES
878

Gordon checks out John o' Groats in 1965 — and spots the recognition of Auckland

A MASTER AT 21

In April 1962, as a schoolboy editor of the fledgling *Motorman* magazine, I interviewed Gordon Miles at an Auckland Car Club loose gravel Bombay hill-climb, and I was later treated to a ride with the 21-year-old master. As usual, Gordon was displaying remarkable consistency during his three runs, romping up the hill-climb and posting successive improvements from 43.1 seconds, to 42.7 seconds, and finally 41.5 seconds.

Having just turned 17, I was mightily impressed by the drive, by Gordon's ability, and by the remarkable performance of the understated Mini. On the road, Miles was quick and precise, making mincemeat of the Sunday day →

Having just turned 17, I was mightily impressed by the drive, by Gordon's ability, and by the remarkable performance of the understated Mini

Ouch! The city streets of Dunedin were slippery for the annual race meeting in 1962, when Gordon made contact with a post. Conditions were so bad that the saloon race was cancelled

trippers and probably motoring faster than he should have been. This set the pattern for how he would drive for the rest of his comparatively short life, be it on the track or public highway.

A month earlier, I could not help but comment on his performance at a Northern Sports Car Club's Ostrich Farm Road hill-climb near Pukekohe, where he astounded the pundits, myself included, taking second overall. "Gordon Miles's driving continues to improve and I think he is quite an outstanding driver. He is not an exhibitionist but a glance at the results sheet highlighted his consistency and pace," I wrote. Ostrich Farm saw his first run take 56.6 seconds, his second improving to 54.0 seconds, and an impressive 53.8 seconds on his third and final attempt.

Headlining the cover of the May 1962 edition of *Motorman* was a road test of the two fastest Minis in New Zealand, but it was the Miles Austin Mini rather than the Bruce McLaren Mini Cooper that was stealing the limelight. The two cover photos depicted Gordon shooting immediately into the lead at the Waimate street race meeting and then one lap later pulling out a further advantage on the rest of the field.

Miles began motor sport in 1958 with a 1948 MG TC at the tender age of 17, almost immediately becoming a force to reckoned with by winning the Bryce Tye Memorial race and the handicap event at the 1959 Clubmen's Day meeting at Ardmore. He progressed to a 2.5 Riley saloon that took him to several class wins at hill-climbs, including a remarkable performance at Ostrich Farm when he beat the formidable six-cylinder Ford Zephyr of Jo Hayes.

The Mini took Miles to first place at Levin in November 1961, but bearing failure, a broken piston ring, and no oil pressure gave him grief at the Ardmore GP meeting. Seven cars lined up for the unique 850cc BMC Mini race at Ardmore that resulted in a furious battle between Don Currey, Neil Johns, Tim Parker, and Miles. Currey just pipped Johns for the victory after Miles retired.

> The car headed north to Dunedin where his Mini was used on a float for the festival procession, while Austin Motors supplied Gordon with an Austin A95 to continue his touring

Earlier in the day, a huge 37-car entry for the 1600cc saloon race included nine Minis. Three of these were the one-litre Coopers driven by the international visitors later to compete in the GP — Scotsman Ron Flockhart, Englishman Roy Salvadori, and Bruce McLaren. Currey won the 850cc class ahead of Johns and Miles, while McLaren was fastest of the 1000cc machines. Some familiar names in unfamiliar cars lined up: Paul Fahey in a Volkswagen, Dennis Marwood in a Humber 80, and Kerry Grant in an Austin A40 Farina. Jim Mullins, who later became a champion Mini Cooper S driver, competed in a Simca.

Clutch, timing-chain, and valve troubles relegated Miles a non-starter at Levin, but during practice at Wigram he was a remarkable three seconds faster than the McLaren Mini Cooper, which had been specially prepared by the MG factory at Abingdon and fitted with Dunlop racing tyres. The McLaren Mini had been significantly lightened, with its seats removed; a single lightweight fiberglass bucket installed; all interior trim taken out; and all glass, apart from the laminated windscreen, replaced with Perspex panels.

Miles finished second in the smaller capacity saloon car event on the Christchurch airfield circuit behind his work boss, Phil Ornstein, in a Hillman Husky. Then in the all-comer tin-top race, which allowed overseas stars in, Miles took the lead from the Coopers of McLaren and Flockhart soon after the start, gaining about half a lap after six rounds. In the closing stages, the Miles Mini was pipped for overall honours by the Archibald Jaguar.

INTERNATIONALS ASTONISHED

McLaren and Flockhart, who had both finished behind the Pukekohe driver, could scarcely believe Gordon's pace, and after the race, the two internationals, both laughing, walked over the grassy Wigram infield to where Miles was peering at his Mini's engine wondering why it had run on three cylinders. Bruce called out, "What have you got under that bonnet, a supercharger?" At that point, the smiling Miles slammed shut the bonnet and sat on it!

At Invercargill, Miles found a welcome reception awaiting him when PH Vickery, the Southland Austin dealer, greeted him and offered its workshop facilities to complete a valve grind. What followed at Teretonga was a spectacular battle, with McLaren just winning ahead of the blue Mini. Gordon was somewhat alarmed by the ferocious tyre wear at Teretonga, relating that he could smell the rubber burning in the cockpit.

The car headed north to Dunedin,

Gordon Miles astounding the crowd at the 1962 Lady Wigram Trophy meeting, keeping ahead of the Jaguar of well-known Christchurch driver Ray Archibald. Miles was just pipped in the closing stages by an off-song engine, but it was a memorable battle

where his Mini was used on a float for the festival procession, while Austin Motors supplied Gordon with an Austin A95 to continue his touring. Practising in the rain on the slippery Dunedin street circuit felt dangerous, the car sideways a good deal of the time and finally hitting a post on a traffic island. Conditions were so bad that the saloon race was cancelled. At the same meeting, Aucklander John Mansel was fatally injured after crashing his Cooper Maserati in the Gold Star feature event.

"I had to keep backing off (on the wet city streets) at Dunedin where it was bad enough in a saloon car so goodness only knows what it was like in a single-seater racing car," Gordon told me.

The following week on the South Canterbury streets of Waimate, Miles led the saloon car race from the start but head-gasket failure prevented him from taking honours. An engine rebuild before the March meeting at Ohakea refreshed the Mini, and Gordon was second to Kerry Grant's potent A40 in his first race. However, in the 30-mile saloon feature, his engine overheated and he had to endure a hair-raising and lengthy tow home behind the Daimler Dart of John Richards.

At the North Island Beach Racing championships at Muriwai, Gordon was again at his best, winning his class though trailing the more powerful Corvette V8-engined Chev coupé of John Riley and Garth Souness. The Mini could not quite pass the big American machines, finally finishing third in the 20-mile race, although he was clearly outclassing the rest of the field.

Not only did Gordon take me for a spin in his much-modified Mini but he also allowed me a drive. The car was one thing, but it was Gordon Miles's skill behind the wheel that most impressed, with his ability to nip in and out of traffic and his general control.

Norris Miles sets a class lap record in the ex–Jochen Mass Cosworth Capri at Oulton Park

Norris works hard in the Alfa Romeo GTV6 en route to victory in the British Saloon Car Championship

THE MILES BROTHERS HEAD TO BRITAIN

His younger brother Norris, who now lives in Melbourne, went on to race a troublesome Heron Daimler 2.5 sports car in 1969. Based on a Lotus 23, the Heron was conceived by Ross Baker and its V8 powertrain was connected to a Citroën DS19 gearbox turned upside down. Norris enjoyed some spirited battles with an up-and-coming David Oxton but recalls difficulties prompting the Daimler engine to run on all eight cylinders. He later found more success with a Lotus 7.

Gordon had a passion for good classic cars, like this Ferrari, which he owned while domiciled in England

Meanwhile, Gordon had reasoned that his future was more likely to prosper in Britain, and moved to England in 1963, where he initially worked for Bruce McLaren. He then established a flourishing chain of motor accessory outlets, marketing motor sport jackets and apparel. Motor racing was still largely on his mind, and in 1978 he competed in the RAC Tricentol British Saloon Car Championship with a Ford Capri II. Miles ran in four races at Oulton Park, Nürburgring, Mugello, and Brands Hatch between 1966 and 1969.

Norris and fellow Kiwi friend Chris Atkinson also went to Britain, where they would establish a car sales yard in Oxford. This also gave Norris the opportunity to race in Britain, where the two Miles brothers were able to mix it with top saloon drivers like Jeff Allam and Win Percy. At a Brands Hatch meeting, Gordon and Norris teamed up in their three-litre 230bhp (172kW) ex-Percy Capri for a Group 1 race. After both qualifying well, Gordon was in good shape 20 minutes into the event before a puncture left his car stranded out on the circuit.

At Mallory Park in 1966, Gordon was fired up in his 2.2 Morgan Plus 4, beating the factory 4.7 Sunbeam Tiger of Bernard Unett. Press reports said →

Gordon Miles was a successful racer in his Morgan Plus 4 when he moved to Britain

that Miles was one of the outstanding winners of the day.

There was a furious battle between the two Morgans of Miles and Neil Dangerfield at Goodwood in June the same year, with the lead swapping and Dangerfield just pipping the New Zealander in the closing stages.

NORRIS WINS FOR ALFA

The younger Miles, Norris, set a class record in the ex–Jochen Mass 3.4 Cosworth Ford–engined Capri at Oulton Park. Norris was busy also keeping the Miles motor sport record alive, racing a Cobra at the Nürburgring and pursuing competitive outings in a Lister Jaguar and a Rover Vitesse. Norris drove for Alfa Romeo GB, notching the first victory for the Alfa GTV6 at Snetterton in 1982. He won the Uniflow Production Car championship in it that year, and Norris recalls being handed the trophy by world champion Niki Lauda. His brother was not there to see it. This story does not have a happy ending.

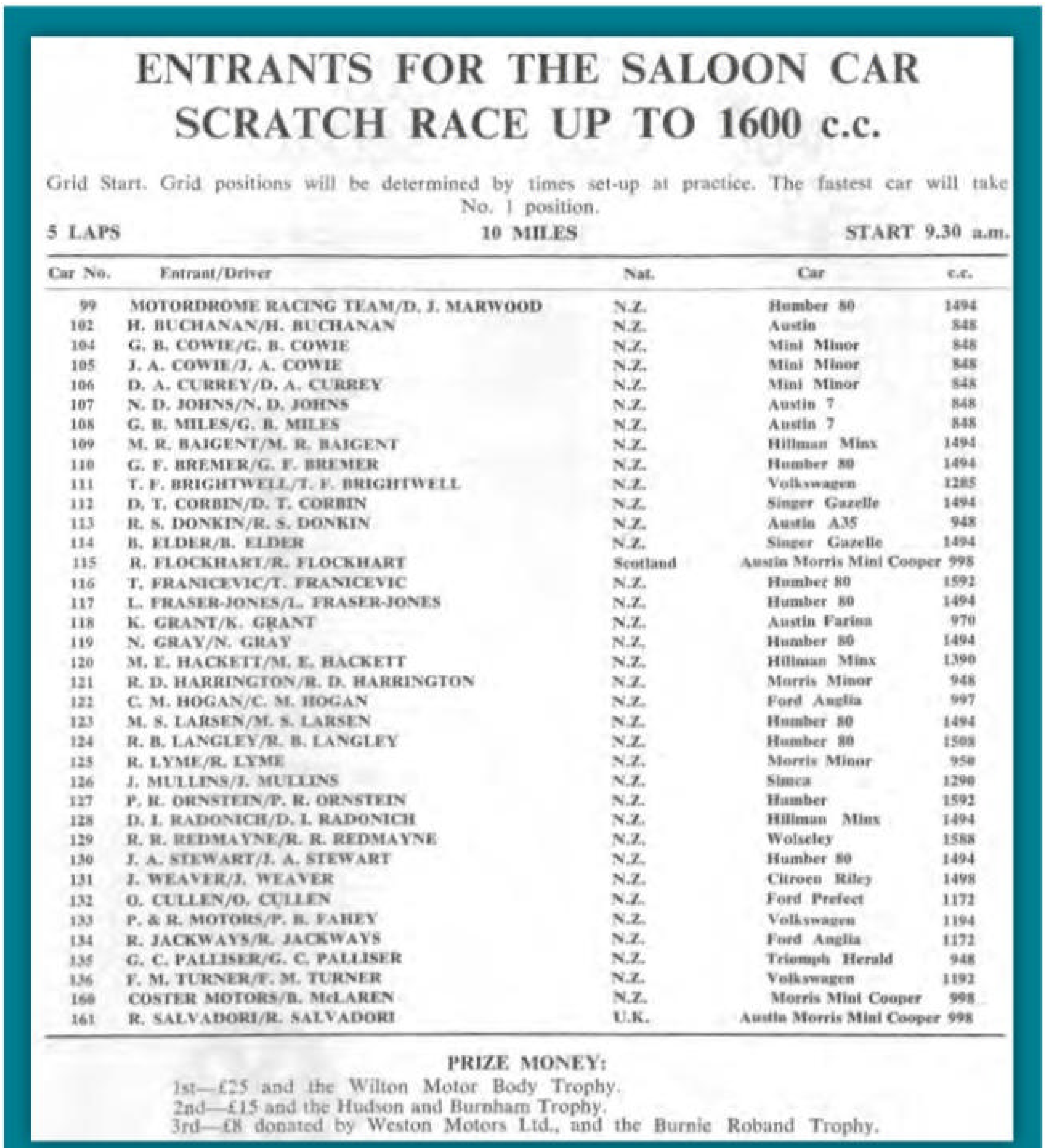
Gordon was clearly keen on classic cars, particularly Ferraris, and owned two Daytonas, one of which he sprinted at Silverstone. He had been competing with Norris at an Easter Oulton Park meeting in March 1978. He headed for home in Oxford in his road-going XJS. His younger brother had returned earlier, towing the race car. Gordon had a habit of driving particularly fast at all times, and Norris recalls a trip to France, with Gordon behind the wheel, when he was a terrified passenger. “I could never believe his speed on the roads; he was always at 100 miles an hour,” said Norris.

Almost home, Gordon was on an undulating straight near Chipping Norton between Oxford and Stratford-upon-Avon when he crested the brow of a rise to find a truck pulling out of a side road. Years later, the courts would rule that what happened was no fault of his own. Just 37 years old, Gordon suffered fatal injuries when his Jaguar violently struck the truck. His widow was unable to keep the business going and it went into voluntary liquidation in 1985. Three years later, the High Court awarded £1M to Gordon’s widow, at the time a record payout for a fatal road accident case in Britain.

Back in Australia and years later, Norris now sees his son, Jonathon, a successful Formula Ford racer, representing Australia at the world Formula Ford event. The motor sport spirit continues within the Miles family.

Pondering the New Zealand racing achievements of Gordon Miles more than 60 years ago, one can only marvel at the pace of that early Mini with apparently less power and inferior brakes than the newer Cooper variants — and the ability of its modest driver.

Minis would go on to be big time on local circuits. Little known or celebrated today, Gordon Miles was a worthy early pioneer of the ‘BMC brick’. He deserves the recognition of being an especially fast driver in an especially quick little car. ■



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SCRATCH RACE UP TO 1600 c.c.

Grid Start. Grid positions will be determined by times set-up at practice. The fastest car will take No. 1 position.

5 LAPS 10 MILES START 9.30 a.m.

Car No.	Entrant/Driver	Nat.	Car	c.c.
99	MOTORDROME RACING TEAM/D. J. MARWOOD	N.Z.	Humber 80	1494
102	H. BUCHANAN/H. BUCHANAN	N.Z.	Austin	848
104	G. B. COWIE/G. B. COWIE	N.Z.	Mini Minor	848
105	J. A. COWIE/J. A. COWIE	N.Z.	Mini Minor	848
106	D. A. CURREY/D. A. CURREY	N.Z.	Mini Minor	848
107	N. D. JOHNS/N. D. JOHNS	N.Z.	Austin 7	848
108	G. B. MILES/G. B. MILES	N.Z.	Austin 7	848
109	M. R. BAIGENT/M. R. BAIGENT	N.Z.	Hillman Minx	1494
110	G. F. BREMER/G. F. BREMER	N.Z.	Humber 80	1494
111	T. F. BRIGHTWELL/T. F. BRIGHTWELL	N.Z.	Volkswagen	1285
112	D. T. CORBIN/D. T. CORBIN	N.Z.	Singer Gazelle	1494
113	R. S. DONKIN/R. S. DONKIN	N.Z.	Austin A35	948
114	B. ELDER/B. ELDER	N.Z.	Singer Gazelle	1494
115	R. FLOCKHART/R. FLOCKHART	Scotland	Austin Morris Mini Cooper	998
116	T. FRANICEVIC/T. FRANICEVIC	N.Z.	Humber 80	1592
117	L. FRASER-JONES/L. FRASER-JONES	N.Z.	Humber 80	1494
118	K. GRANT/K. GRANT	N.Z.	Austin Farina	970
119	N. GRAY/N. GRAY	N.Z.	Humber 80	1494
120	M. E. HACKETT/M. E. HACKETT	N.Z.	Hillman Minx	1390
121	R. D. HARRINGTON/R. D. HARRINGTON	N.Z.	Morris Minor	948
122	C. M. HOGAN/C. M. HOGAN	N.Z.	Ford Anglia	997
123	M. S. LARSEN/M. S. LARSEN	N.Z.	Humber 80	1494
124	R. B. LANGLEY/R. B. LANGLEY	N.Z.	Humber 80	1508
125	R. LYME/R. LYME	N.Z.	Morris Minor	950
126	J. MULLINS/J. MULLINS	N.Z.	Simca	1290
127	P. R. ORNSTEIN/P. R. ORNSTEIN	N.Z.	Humber	1592
128	D. I. RADONICH/D. I. RADONICH	N.Z.	Hillman Minx	1494
129	R. R. REDMAYNE/R. R. REDMAYNE	N.Z.	Wolseley	1588
130	J. A. STEWART/J. A. STEWART	N.Z.	Humber 80	1494
131	J. WEAVER/J. WEAVER	N.Z.	Citroen Riley	1498
132	O. CULLEN/O. CULLEN	N.Z.	Ford Prefect	1172
133	P. & R. MOTORS/P. B. FAHEY	N.Z.	Volkswagen	1194
134	R. JACKWAYS/R. JACKWAYS	N.Z.	Ford Anglia	1172
135	G. C. PALLISER/G. C. PALLISER	N.Z.	Triumph Herald	948
136	F. M. TURNER/F. M. TURNER	N.Z.	Volkswagen	1192
160	COSTER MOTORS/B. McLAREN	N.Z.	Morris Mini Cooper	998
161	R. SALVADORI/R. SALVADORI	U.K.	Austin Morris Mini Cooper	998

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Impressive 27-car entry for the 1962 New Zealand GP at the Ardmore saloon car event, which included three then-new Mini Coopers driven by Formula 1 drivers — plus six 848cc Minis, one of which was in the hands of Gordon Miles

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FUNNY CARS AT THE BRICKYARD

Sixty years ago, Colin Chapman's flimsy, fragile, rear-engined little Limey machines started down the road to consigning the fire-breathing 'Offy'-engined roadsters that had dominated the Indy 500 to history

By Michael Clark

In May 1962, Colin Chapman was Dan Gurney's guest at the Indianapolis 500. At the time, the tall Californian was contracted to Porsche in Formula 1 (F1) but when the German team left motor racing's ultimate echelon at the end of that year, he joined the new Brabham team where he stayed for the next three years. Gurney was acutely aware of the hardware that had come to dominate the IndyCar grids and was no doubt expecting Chapman to be intrigued with what he would see.

Every Indy 500 since 1953 had been won by massive front-engined cars widely known as 'roadsters'. Before long, all 33 starters would be roadsters, most often powered by the 4.2-litre Offenhauser four-cylinder. The sound of one 'Offy' was something to behold, but 30 or so were a treat that drew fans from far and wide.

Jim Clark in the 'Lotus powered by Ford' at Indy in 1963. Colin Chapman is in the tie

Occasionally, an interloper would emerge like the Cummins diesel or the ultimate underdog, the V8 Novi, which always promised so much but always failed. Hopefuls who put the engine behind the driver appeared occasionally but were rarely taken seriously, and they failed to deliver.

Then, in 1961, the reigning world champion driver and team showed up. The four-cylinder Coventry Climax in the back of Jack Brabham's Cooper had been stretched to 2.75 litres, as far as it could go. Despite its superior cornering speed and lighter weight that would mean longer runs between stops, the power deficiency was too big a gap to bridge — but it got some of the more fertile minds thinking, one of which was Gurney's.

The Chapman star was well in its ascendency in mid 1962. The success of his star driver in F1 was widely viewed as being due to the brilliance of his monocoque chassis design. The firm was also seeing success with the Ford-based Lotus twin-cam, while Formula Junior Lotus designs were keenly sought by aspiring F1 drivers. Still not 35, Anthony Colin Bruce Chapman was widely viewed as possessing a Midas touch — all of which fuelled a well-established towering ego. When his car failed to win at its first Indy outing, Chapman would have been aghast. Presumably, he already had a winning design in mind even before the race had concluded. The massive size of the purse, compared

One of the best — Parnelli Jones in his 1963 Indy 500–winning Watson-Offy

with F1 prize money at the time, would have also held his attention.

Adding some historical perspective to the story, the last front-engined car to win an F1 Grand Prix (GP) triumphed in 1960. The change to rear engined was dramatic and comprehensive. As recently as 1958, the world championship had been fought out between front-engined cars, the Ferrari of Mike Hawthorn and the Vanwall of Stirling Moss. Moss had defied all expectations to show that a rear-engined car could actually win a GP at the opening round of the championship in 1958 in a Cooper when the Vanwall wasn't available. By 1962, front-engined cars had vanished from F1 but at 'the Speedway', in Indiana — American motor racing's holy ground — no one was taking these funny cars with the engine in the wrong place seriously. The US really was the land of opportunity. Chapman saw an open goal in an innovation wasteland.

Back home, not only did the Lotus twin-cam engine make the Elan such a standout small sports car, but it also transformed Ford's new offering. Whether anyone ever seriously predicted the magic that would result from introducing that motor to the Cortina, we don't know, but, six decades later, the name 'Lotus-Cortina' is a combination that still stirs emotion. YouTube has introduced Jim Clark's wheel-waving antics to a new generation of enthusiasts who weren't yet thought of when his white-with-green-flash two-door was leaving fans shaking their heads in disbelief at Snetterton, Brands Hatch, and Oulton Park. Ford's links with Lotus were evolving nicely, so it was to the Blue Oval that Chapman turned as he planned his attack on Indy in 1963. At 4.2 litres, Ford's V8 Fairlane engine had the right capacity but work was needed to convert it from a lump designed to mobilise a compact sedan into something worthy of powering the latest from ACB Chapman.

Sixty years ago, when they arrived at the Speedway in early May, Clark was looking good for his and Chapman's first world title. In F1, Lotus had yet to adopt the yellow stripe, but for Indy, where garish liveries were the norm, Chapman's latest had generous dollops of his favourite colour on Clark's car. Thanks to his deal with Ford, Gurney's car was actually painted in Ford's combo of white with blue nose and stripe. Some of the establishment thought this new 'funny car' outfit ought to be taken seriously but most considered the cars flimsy, fragile little Limey machines. They were not only 'not made here', but they obviously wouldn't tolerate pounding 500 miles around motor sport's most famous rectangle.

> The sound of one 'Offy' was something to behold, but 30 or so were a treat that drew fans from far and wide

As it happens, Lotus didn't win on debut, even if it deserved to, as victory went, rather controversially, to the oil-leaking roadster of Parnelli Jones. Chapman implored officials to black flag the tough and talented Californian, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Clark was second. If the establishment was rattled by this Limey interloper, it didn't show it then.

The appetites of Clark and Chapman had been whetted — they'd be back.

EMOTION AT IMOLA

My first GP at Circuit Paul Ricard in the south of France was actually a dreary affair that also left me a little chastened. I'd ditched the hire car within half a kilometre of collecting it and then sat in the passenger seat as my young bride made her left-hand-drive debut with the aplomb of a natural — but the second race on our 1983 odyssey could not have been more different.

Forty years ago, we spent weekdays looking at cathedrals and art galleries, and weekends at race tracks across Europe. Since 1981, Italy had had two F1 GPs — the Italian at Monza in September and, a few months earlier, at Imola near Bologna. It was named after the tiny principality of San Marino, which is a bit further down the road. Against the odds, Keke Rosberg had won the 1982 World Championship, but everyone expected that that would be the last for a normally aspirated car — surely the turbos would rule in 1983.

Renault and Ferrari led the turbo charge in 1982 with their 1.5-litre V6s. Brabham started the '83 season with turbo victory in Brazil for the four-cylinder BMW. A non-turbo Cosworth-powered car could still be competitive on a street circuit, as the →

When Ferrari drivers Gilles Villeneuve (right) and Didier Pironi fell out during the 1982 season, it sparked a deadly intra-team battle

McLarens had shown at Long Beach, but on 'power circuits', the latest versions of the turbocharged cars had improved reliability to go with their power advantage. The French GP had highlighted the gap … did I mention it was turgid?

To understand the significance of the result, 'our' second GP requires a step back to the same race at Imola a year earlier when the Ferrari v. Renault rivalry was just starting to bubble up. Indeed, the inter-team rivalries were already festering — at Renault, Alain Prost and René Arnoux hadn't yet publicly fallen out of love, but it wasn't far off. But at Ferrari, the cold, calculating Didier Pironi had closed the performance gap on crowd favourite Gilles Villeneuve. In 1981, Villeneuve had routinely trounced his teammate, but the 1982 car was a major improvement, and it better suited the suave Pironi's smooth style. Prior to the 1982 San Marino GP, the Ferrari pair struck a deal whereby they wouldn't race each other to the bitter end should they be running one-two. As the Canadian had qualified quicker, the race would be his, should the cards fall in favour of the red cars. When Pironi went by a few laps from home, Villeneuve had no need to be concerned. They had a deal — just as Gilles had struck with previous teammate Jody Scheckter that facilitated the South African's world championship in 1979.

Except Pironi didn't honour the arrangement and went on to take the win. A Frenchman with an Italian surname winning in a Ferrari in Italy should surely have been cause for a big celebration but the tifosi, clearly on Villeneuve's side, shared his despair and glumness on the podium. Villeneuve vowed to never speak to Pironi again. In a flash, inter-team hatred erupted.

> Villeneuve had routinely trounced his teammate, but the 1982 car was a major improvement, and it better suited the suave Pironi's smooth style

The next round was at Belgium's Zolder circuit, and Villeneuve, desperate to emphasise his place at the top of the Italian team, went out to nail pole position. He was going for it when he encountered the dawdling March of Jochen Mass, who was innocently minding his own business as he headed back to the pits. They collided and such was the severity of the impact that Villeneuve had no chance of survival. The already-polarised Ferrari fans now had even more reason to detest Pironi — notwithstanding the fact that he now stood a good chance of giving them a world championship.

Even a team like Ferrari struggles to find an available driver part-way through a season; the best drivers have the most iron-clad contracts. Yet out of the darkness appeared the charming Frenchman Patrick Tambay. Coincidentally, Villeneuve had become a Ferrari driver after McLaren had determined Tambay had the better prospects but, after two forgettable seasons at the end of the '70s, Tambay looked like becoming a nearly man. He'd been brought into Ligier part-way through 1981 only to discover that the French team was struggling to run a two-car set-up — and then he was back to the margins.

When he got the call-up to replace Villeneuve, it's fair to say that we all expected he'd continue his previous bridesmaid role but with the faint hope that, as a dear friend of Gilles, he could do his late mate proud and put →

Villeneuve's expression on the podium in 1982 said it all

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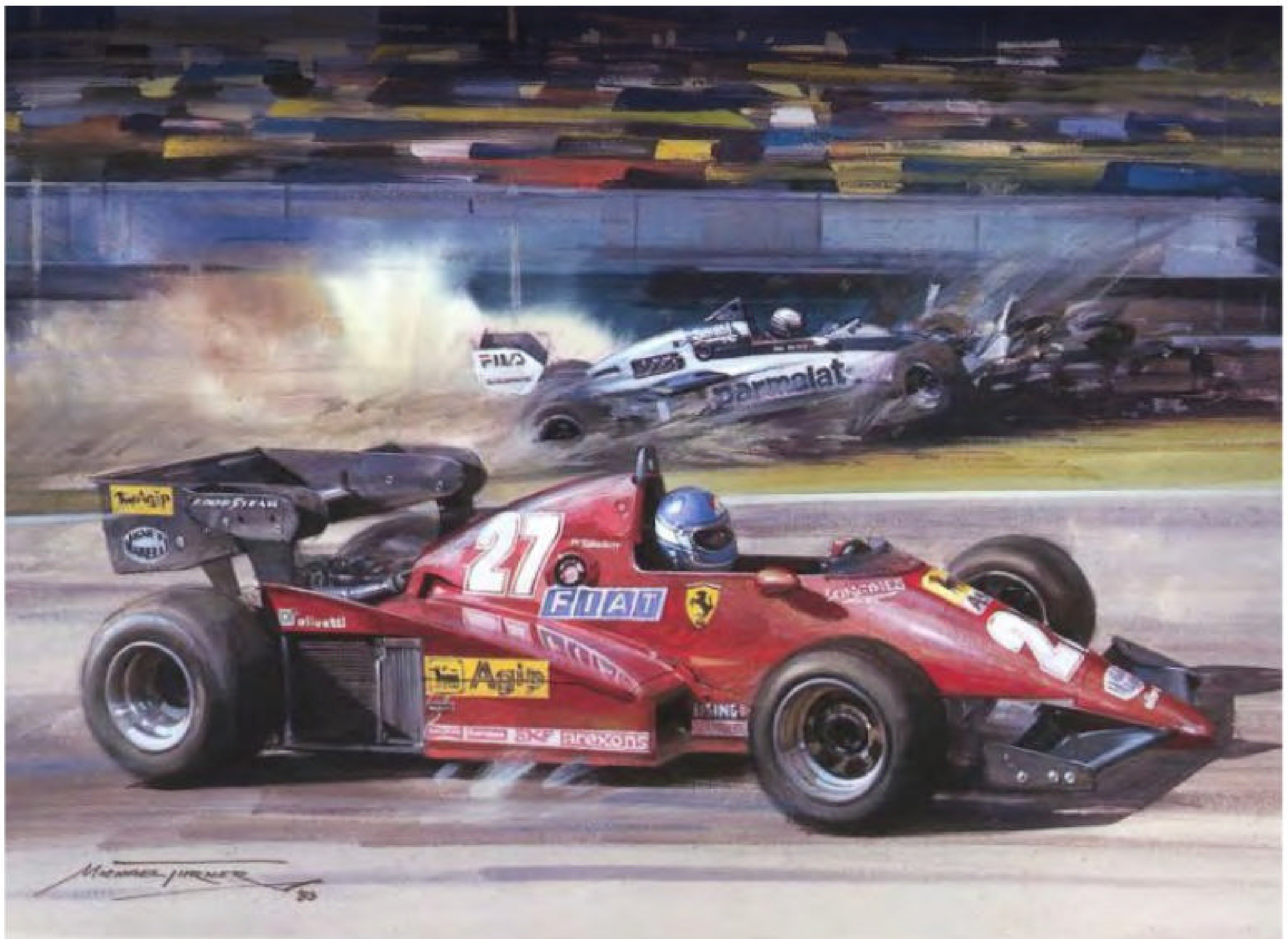

Michael Turner's painting magnificently captures Tambay's Ferrari passing the crashing Patrese

> We didn't understand the words but the vibe was such that Italians around us started cheering and hugging. Then we saw Tambay and it became clear that something had happened

some heat on Pironi. Tambay thrived in his new environment and was on the podium in his second race for the Scuderia. Two races later, in Germany, Pironi crashed heavily in practice. Not only was his season over, but his career was also finished. Tambay, having emerged from the wilderness only weeks earlier, now led the most famous team in F1. He won the German GP and cemented himself into the Ferrari team for 1983.

When we arrived on race day, the first of May, the poignancy of Tambay, in No. 27, starting from the third position on the grid, was not lost — it was the same position that Villeneuve had started from a year earlier, also carrying that number on his blood-red Ferrari. Indeed, a tiny Canadian flag had been painted at the front of the grid box as a reminder — or was it an omen? For most of the race, the chance of the fairy-tale result we'd hoped for looked remote as the BMW-powered Brabham of Riccardo Patrese led commendably.

Tambay was established in second place but then came an elevated level of excitement over the PA. We didn't understand the words but the vibe was such that Italians around us started cheering and hugging. Then we saw Tambay and it became clear that something had happened to Patrese. With only six laps to run, and seemingly cruising to victory, Patrese had spun off.

If we'd ever doubted the hold that the red cars have over the tifosi, here it was. One of their countrymen, on the cusp of resurrecting his once-promising career, spins out of the race and hands victory to a Ferrari driven by a Frenchman and the tifosi go wild. Of course, there was more to it — this was payback, of sorts, for their beloved Gilles — perhaps the most universally idolised Ferrari driver up to that time — and possibly ever. Tambay never won another GP, but nothing could ever top that emotional day at Imola 40 years ago.

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Patrick Tambay celebrates on the podium at the 1983 F1 San Marino GP

One hundred years of Bentley

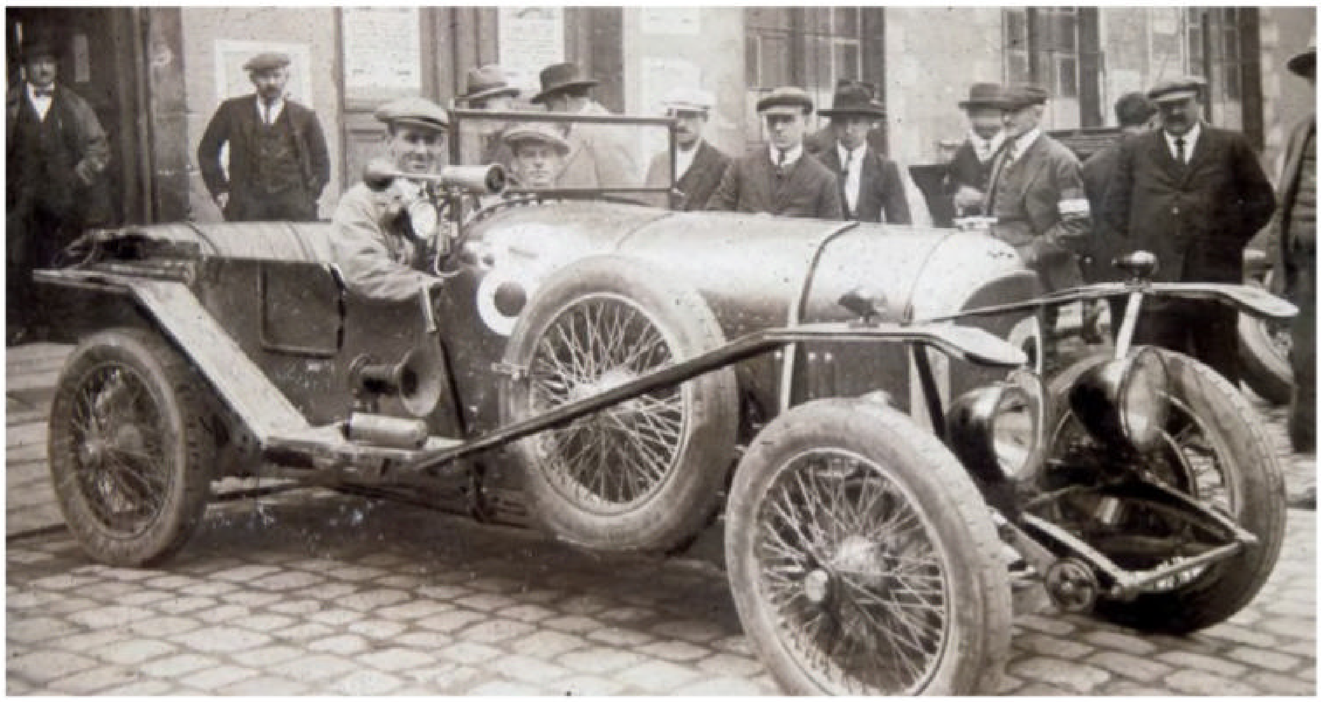
LE MANS AND BENTLEY

One hundred years ago, over the last weekend of May, the first 'round the clock' motor race at Le Mans ended in a one-two for a pair of works Chenard-Walcker Sport 3 Litres. The winning car had averaged a whisker over 92kph in an event marked by wind, heavy rain, and a hailstorm. In fourth place was the first non-French car, which had also set the fastest lap. Captain John Duff and Frank Clement had introduced Bentley to Le Premier Grand Prix d'Endurance des 24 Heures du Mans, but it's unlikely that this odd couple knew what they'd started. Duff entered the car after company founder WO Bentley made it clear that he was convinced the event was madness and that no car would finish.

Such was Bentley car salesman Duff's persistence that 'WO' agreed to a car being prepared by the works, and he provided his test driver, Clement. Although they'd challenged for the lead, stones from the rough track had ruptured Duff and Clement's fuel tank. The rules meant that only drivers could work on the cars, meaning that, after the car had run out of fuel some distance from the pits, Clement used a pushbike to transport a can of petrol back to the stricken car to get it back to the pits for repairs.

At the last minute, WO had made the decision to attend and, in all the excitement, became besotted. In 1924 Duff and Clement were again aboard the sole British starter. This time, the first Bentley boys won comfortably. The love affair was consummated, and Bentleys won four in a row from 1927 to 1930.

In 2001, after a 73-year break, Bentley returned to Le Mans with the twin-turbocharged Audi V8–powered EXP Speed 8 and celebrated third behind a pair of related Audi R8s. In 2002, the patriotically livered Bentley was fourth, this time behind three Audis, but in 2003, 80 years after the first Le Mans, the great name again prevailed. The two 4.0-litre Speed 8s locked out the front row and then proceeded to finish one-two, with the second-placed car setting fastest lap. It was game, set, and match to the green cars. Usurping such a result was impossible, and after crushing the opposition, Bentley withdrew again. →



Le Mans, 1924. The 3 Litre of John Duff and Frank Clement secured the first of Bentley's six wins at the race

Bentley's 2003 Le Mans–winning Speed 8

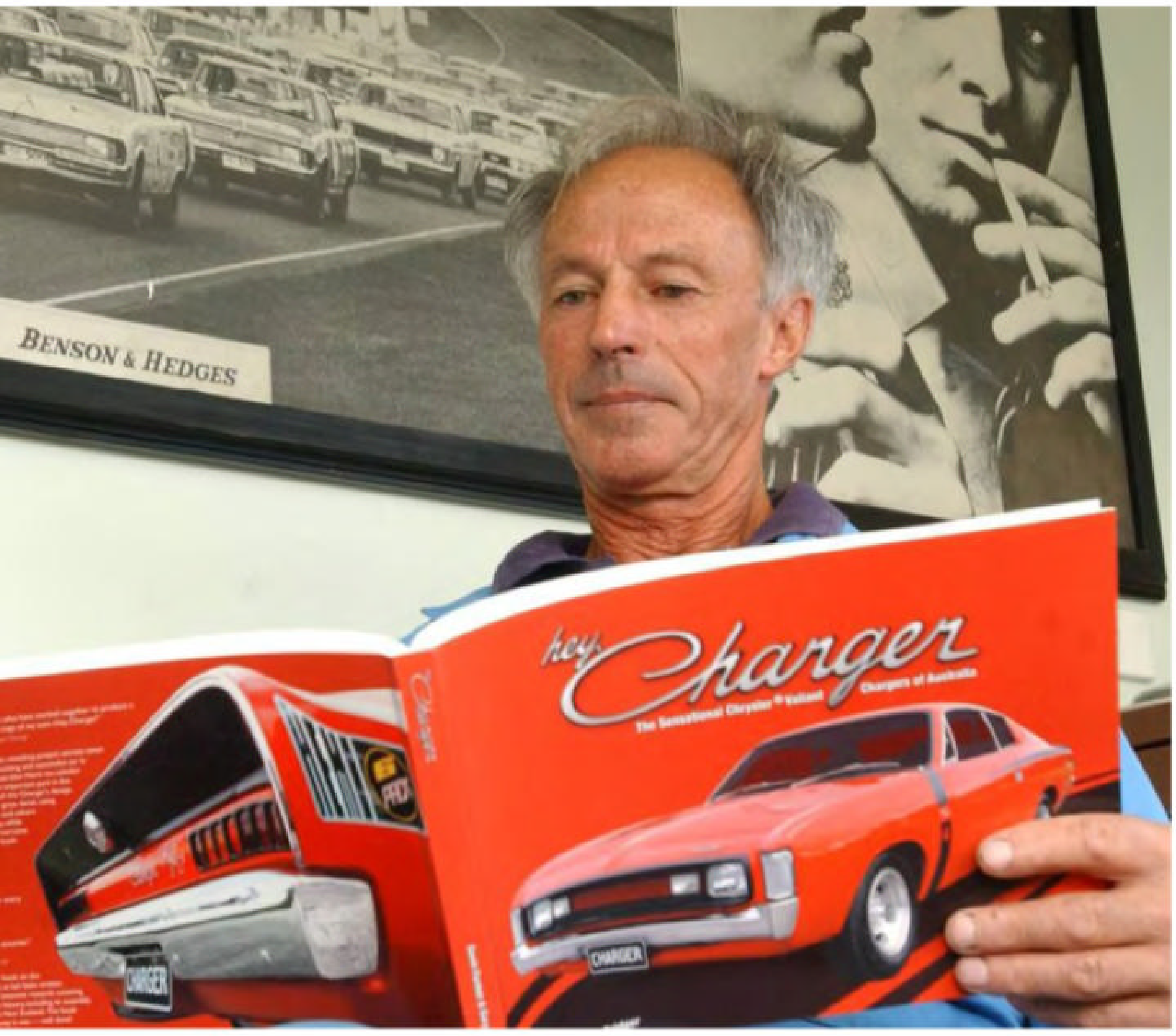
Allan Woolf — one of the great storytellers at the farewell to Pukekohe dinner

A FAREWELL TO PUKEKOHE

A memorable dinner at the circuit on the last Saturday of February was something of a who's who of New Zealand motor racing. The MC asked if everyone who had been at the first ever GP there in 1963 could stand and it was surprising how many of the diners rose to their feet. Those who competed in the first race and finished on the podium were asked to remain standing, meaning that — not for the last time that night — we all got to applaud Jimmy Palmer in whose honour the meeting was promoted.

Competitors in either the Wills Six Hour or Benson & Hedges 500 were then asked to stand, followed by the instruction to "remain standing if you never cheated", which is when the hilarity and comical tone of the evening was set. Fingers were pointed at a multiple winner, who immediately sat with the look of a choirboy as he wondered why he had suddenly become the centre of attention.

A huge personality who had won pretty much everything other than the long-distance production car race at Pukekohe sat down, folded his arms, and loudly announced, "Well, I never cheated." That instantly prompted one of the quieter members of New Zealand motor sport's elite to respond with "Oh, bullshit!" So many of the stories that followed should really have been recorded. It was a memorable way to say good-bye to the old girl. ■


BENSON & HEDGES
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Timaruvian, Leo Leonard, had the audience in stitches with his recollection of borrowing the wheels from a spectator's 3.3 Victor

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4

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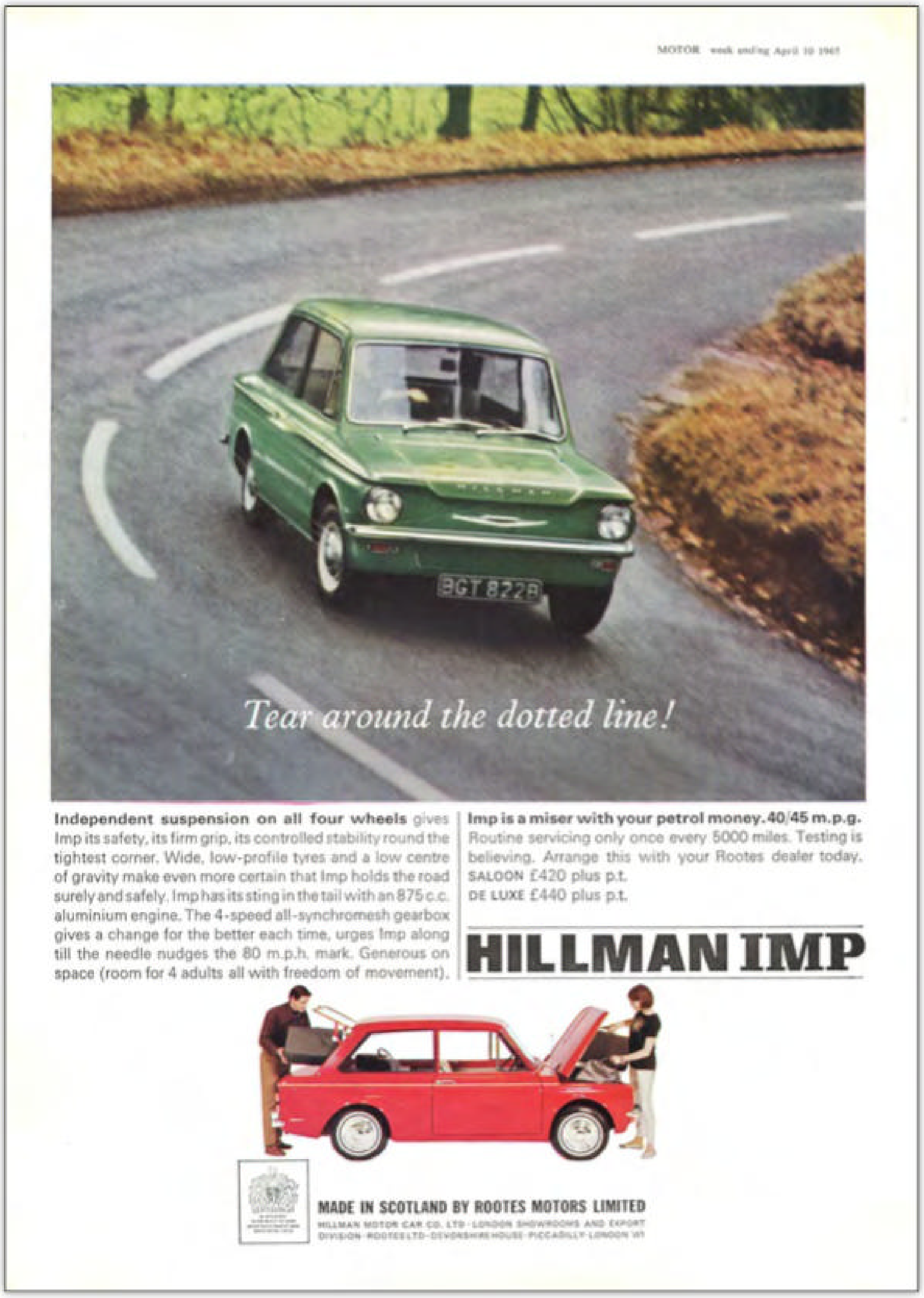
ROOTES GROUP'S MINI-BASHER

Whether badged as a Hillman, Sunbeam, or Commer, the Imp is one of the quirkiest and most charming of all contemporary British classics

By Ben Selby



Tear around the dotted line!

Independent suspension on all four wheels gives Imp its safety, its firm grip, its controlled stability round the tightest corner. Wide, low-profile tyres and a low centre of gravity make even more certain that Imp holds the road surely and safely. Imp has its sting in the tail with an 875 c.c. aluminium engine. The 4-speed all-synchromesh gearbox gives a change for the better each time, urges Imp along till the needle nudges the 80 m.p.h. mark. Generous on space (room for 4 adults all with freedom of movement).

Imp is a miser with your petrol money. 40/45 m.p.g. Routine servicing only once every 5000 miles. Testing is believing. Arrange this with your Rootes dealer today.

SALOON £420 plus p.t.
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HILLMAN IMP

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BMC had the Mini, Ford had the Anglia, and the Rootes Group gave us the Imp. They had given the go-ahead to designers Mike Parkes, later a Formula 1 driver, and Tim Fry. The Imp made waves for its unconventional styling and layout and, like its main rival, the Mini, its bare-essentials approach to motoring. "I think cult-classic-wise, they have a lot of character," says Imp enthusiast Simon Dobier. "The design has character; for the day, it was quite a cool design."

Its hinged rear window gave access to a regular-shaped rubber-lined boot. That and the fold-flat rear seat anticipated the hatchback that came to dominate the small car world in the '80s. The shopping had to be lifted over the car's cute rear bustle, but that couldn't be done away with, as the engine was under there. "Another key thing was that jewel of an engine, the Coventry Climax — all alloy with an overhead cam. It made it a wonderful car to drive, which was very light in the steering," says Simon.

RACE-BRED ENGINE

In a reversal of the usual route, the 875cc and 998cc Coventry Climax four-cylinder engines, which also featured a trick valve layout to encourage swirl, had moved from their racing origins into passenger cars.

While in numbers on the track it lagged behind the Mini and the Anglia, the Imp had its time in the sun. It won the 1000cc class in the British Saloon Car Championship three times in the early '70s.

"The George Bevan Sunbeam Imp, driven by Bill McGovern, winning the championship three years in a row meant the Imp could fight with the all-conquering Minis and Anglias. After this breakthrough, they started to get a big following with the motor sport fraternity and the general public," says Imp owner David Browne.

It was the first British production car to feature synchromesh on first gear, something that the Mini's designer, Sir Alex Issigonis, reputedly said was impossible. The Imp remained in production from 1963 to 1976 and many variants saw the light of day. These included the Hillman Husky van, the Singer Chamois Sport Coupe and Sunbeam Stiletto to name a few. Imp production also came to New Zealand in 1966.

> A fully restored Sunbeam or Hillman Imp can still be had for a lot less than some other contemporary British classics

Today, it's very much a case of supply and demand when it comes to buying an Imp. "There is just not a lot of them

> There has never been a better time to bag yourself a slice of this once-underappreciated icon

Our cheeky Imps.
WHP 449K

around these days," says Imp enthusiast Graham Trotter. The ones that remain on New Zealand roads tend to be sold from within club circles so, if you are after an Imp, it would pay to get involved with the club. The club scene in New Zealand and in the UK is very strong, and there is no shortage of specialists to provide owners with every mechanical component and part imaginable. "Generally, they are sold within the club scene, so the owners can know that it will go to someone who will genuinely appreciate them," says David.

In terms of what to pay, anything from a project to a fully restored Sunbeam or Hillman Imp can still be had for a lot less than some other contemporary British classics. For "[a] rough one which needs light restoration, expect to spend between $3K to $4K. Something that is tidy but needs fettling would be around the $5K mark, while the Sunbeams which have been very nicely looked after, realistically go for between $12K to $15K," says Simon.

"At the other end of the scale, fully restored examples have been sold for the low $20Ks. If you want a fastback Singer coupé, a van, station wagon, or another rare variant in the same condition, then you are looking at $20K and up. That said, it is still great buying," he says.

David Browne agrees. In the UK, Imps are changing hands for quite a bit more. "A minter will sell for the New Zealand equivalent of $30K or more. Plus, if you have a good modified one with history, such as the George Bevan race car, which was recently restored, you couldn't get that for less than £150K," he says.

STRONG CLUB

Like all British cars of the period, it is essential to check the rust situation before buying. "Check just around the inner guards and outer skin, the bottom of the sills, and around the guttering a wee bit. You have to look out whether people have bogged them out a bit. New Zealand ones aren't too bad compared to those in the UK with their salted roads," says David. "Have a look around the back panels. Being rear-wheel drive, the Imp can throw up road dirt, which can affect things," says Graham.

"Have a look at the sills below the doors. The wheel arches tend to get a bit moth-eaten. Plus, if the bottoms of the doors get blocked, water will collect and it will rust them out," says Simon.

Mechanically, the Imp has overcome its earlier reliability issues, but according to Simon, checking the cooling system is advised: "The cooling system is a bit marginal to say the least, so in the summertime keep an eye on it. Drop the radiator out every couple of years and de-gunk the fans on your water pump and the outside of the radiator. Otherwise, it does get a dirty film which blocks the air flow. Mechanics are a lot less frightened than they used to be. With modern tech and info in the club, they are a good classic to maintain on a budget."

With the ability to build an entire car from scratch due to the spares available locally and overseas, plus an extensive tightly knit club network too, there has never been a better time to bag yourself a slice of this once-underappreciated icon. As Graham Trotter says, "They will go up in value." ■

New Zealand Classic Car magazine

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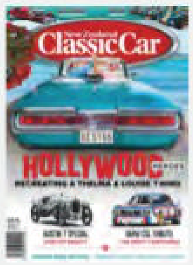
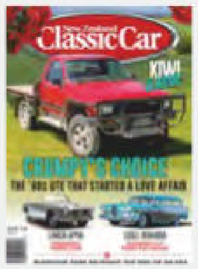
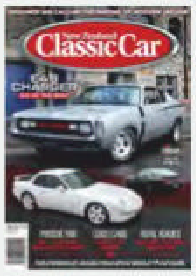
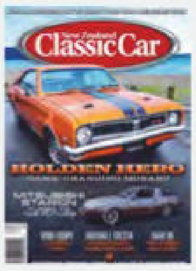

Issue 386
Mar/Apr 2023


Issue 385
January 2023

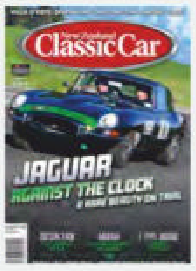

Issue 384
December 2022

Issue 383
November 2022

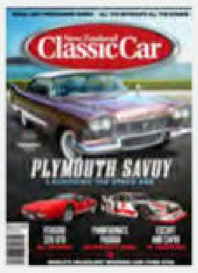
Issue 382
October 2022


Issue 381
September 2022

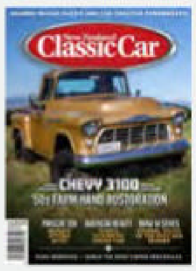
Issue 380
August 2022


Issue 379
July 2022

Issue 378
June 2022

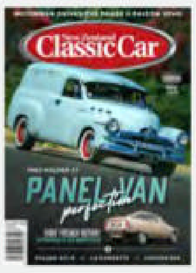

Issue 371
November 2021

Issue 370
October 2021

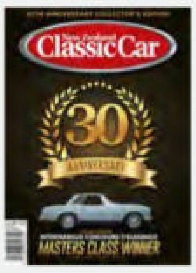

Issue 369
September 2021

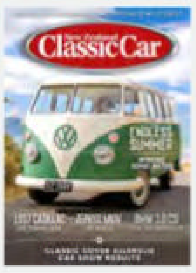
Issue 368
August 2021

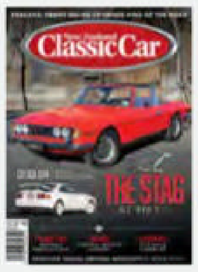
Issue 367
July 2021

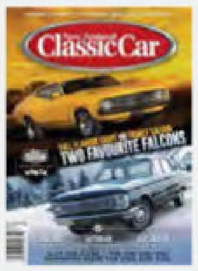

Issue 366
June 2021

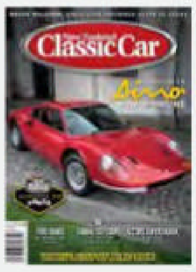
Issue 365
May 2021

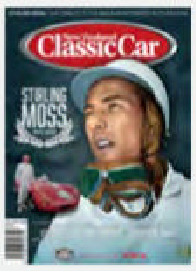

Issue 364
April 2021


Issue 363
March 2021


Issue 356
August 2020

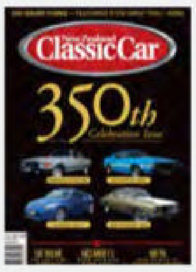

Issue 355
July 2020

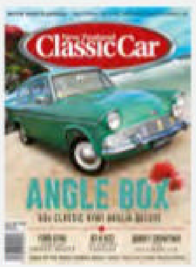

Issue 354
June 2020


Issue 353
May 2020

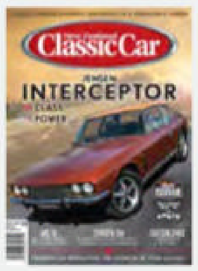
Issue 352
April 2020

Issue 351
March 2020


Issue 350
February 2020

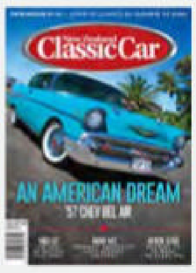

Issue 349
January 2020

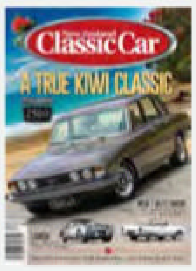
Issue 348
December 2019


Issue 341
May 2019

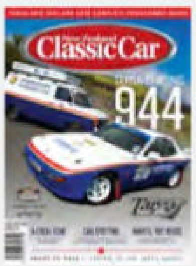
Issue 340
April 2019

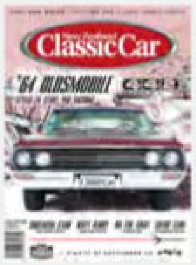
Issue 339
March 2019


Issue 338
February 2019

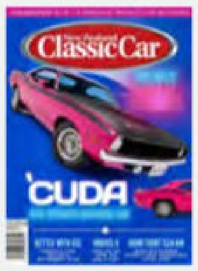

Issue 337
January 2019

Issue 336
December 2018


Issue 335
November 2018


Issue 334
October 2018

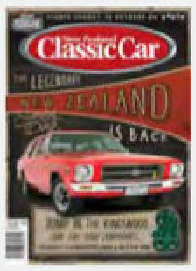
Issue 333
September 2018


Issue 326
February 2018

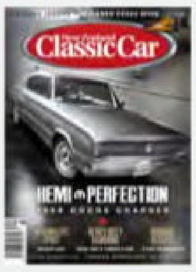
Issue 325
January 2018

Issue 324
December 2017

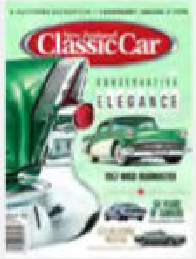
Issue 323
November 2017


Issue 322
October 2017

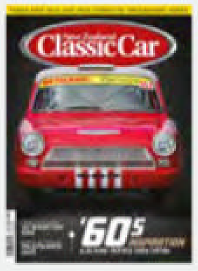
Issue 321
September 2017

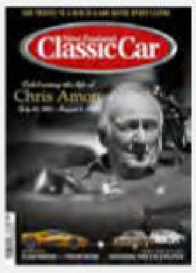

Issue 320
August 2017

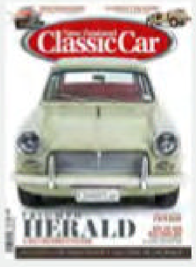
Issue 319
July 2017


Issue 318
June 2017

Issue 311
November 2016


Issue 310
October 2016


Issue 309
September 2016

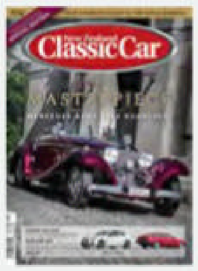

Issue 308
August 2016

Issue 307
July 2016

Issue 306
June 2016

Issue 305
May 2016

Issue 304
April 2016


Issue 303
March 2016

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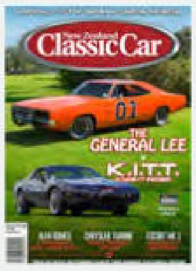
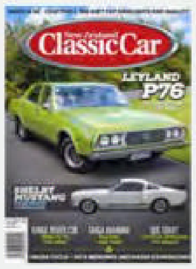
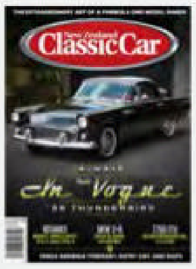
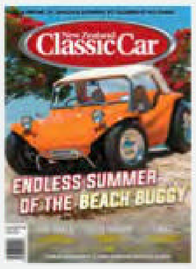
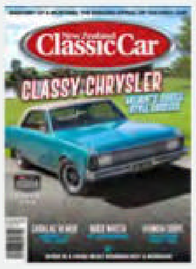

Issue 377
May 2022


Issue 376
April 2022


Issue 375
March 2022

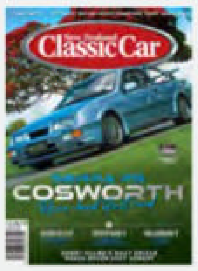
Issue 374
February 2022

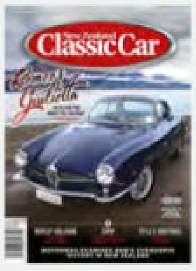

Issue 373
January 2022

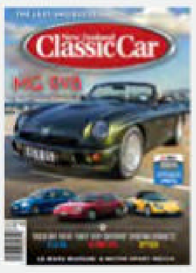

Issue 372
December 2021

Issue 362
February 2021

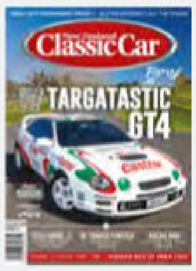
Issue 361
January 2021

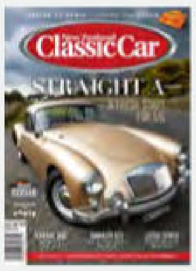

Issue 360
December 2020

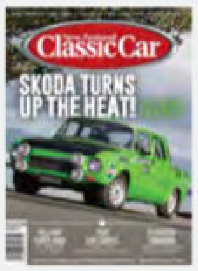

Issue 359
November 2020

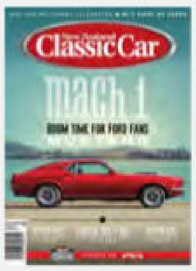

Issue 358
October 2020

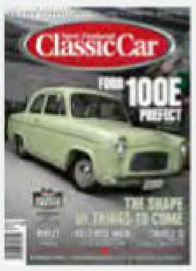
Issue 357
September 2020

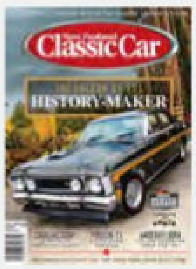

Issue 347
November 2019

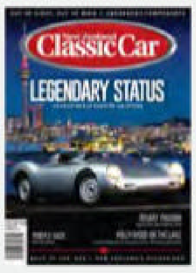

Issue 346
October 2019

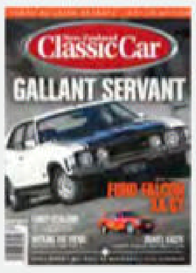

Issue 345
September 2019

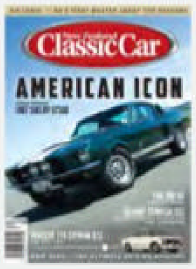

Issue 344
August 2019


Issue 343
July 2019

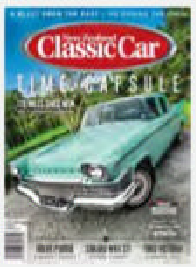

Issue 342
June 2019


Issue 332
August 2018


Issue 331
July 2018


Issue 330
June 2018

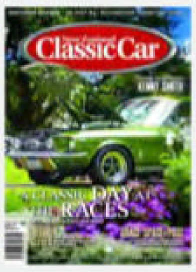
Issue 329
May 2018

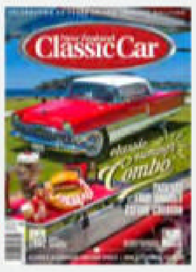

Issue 328
April 2018

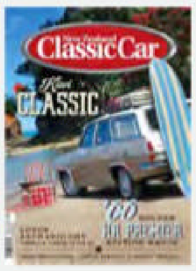
Issue 327
March 2018

Issue 317
May 2017

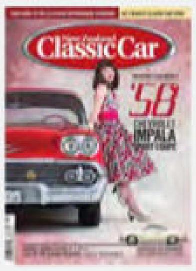
Issue 316
April 2017

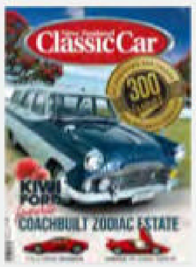

Issue 315
March 2017


Issue 314
February 2017


Issue 313
January 2017

Issue 312
December 2016

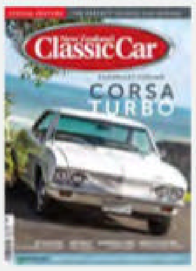

Issue 302
February 2016


Issue 301
January 2016

Issue 300
December 2015

Issue 299
November 2015

Issue 298
October 2015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☐ **297**
☐ **298**
☐ **299**
☐ **300**
☐ **301**
☐ **302**
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☐ **385**
☐ **386**

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RESKINNING A DOOR

Jim explains why panel work is best left to the professionals

By Jim Richardson

Spot welds must be drilled out to remove the door's outer skin

While this series is generally about jobs you can tackle at home given a bit of encouragement and good advice, this one is a little different. In essence, it highlights the many tasks involved in which experience counts. They add up to an argument for not tackling this work yourself unless you have proven skills in this area.

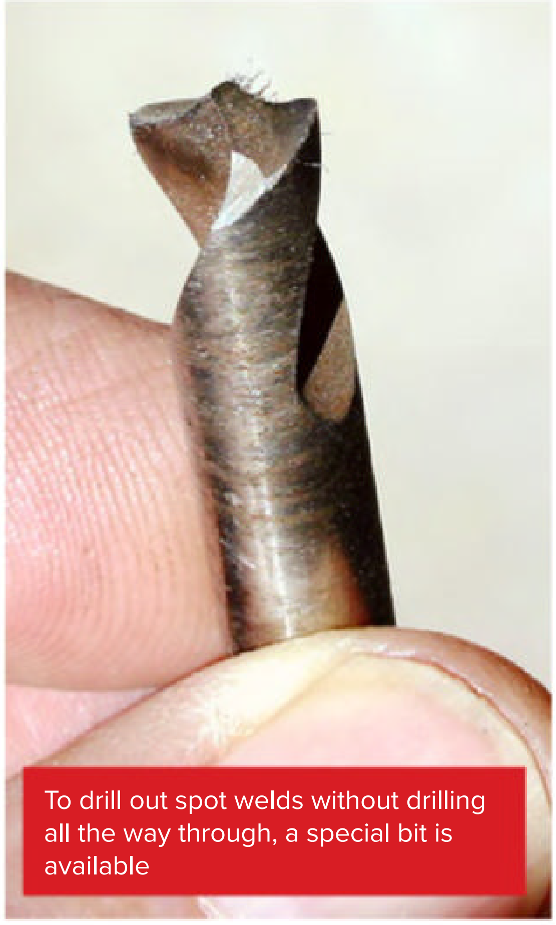
If you have never done bodywork, I would take a class before starting on your classic, or leave this job to a pro, because little mistakes can mount up and make a big mess. However, if you know you are good with a hammer and dolly, you may be able to do the job yourself and save money. I got to observe panel-beater extraordinaire Bruce Haye at Ace Panel and Paint in Whitianga reskin the doors on an MGB, and here is what I learned.

GRINDING AND CHISELLING

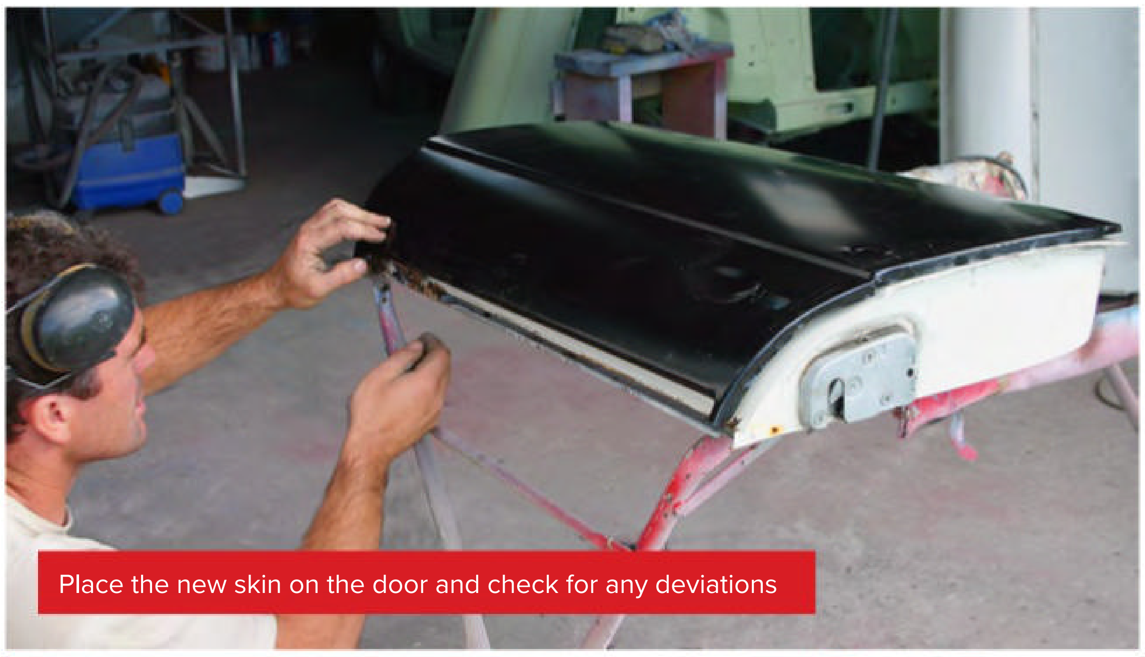
First, he unbolted the driver's side door and put it on a cushioned rack. Next, he ground around the edges of the door to remove the old skin. If you are going to skin a door yourself, make quick, even passes with a die grinder to avoid taking off too much in one sweep. Also, don't linger in one spot.

Keep making sweeping passes until you see the metal change colour. It will start to turn blue as the lip of the door skin gets thinner. At that point, one last light pass should expose the laminations of metal. Use a chisel to pop the bent-over flange off. It will drop easily once you have cut through the edge of the door.

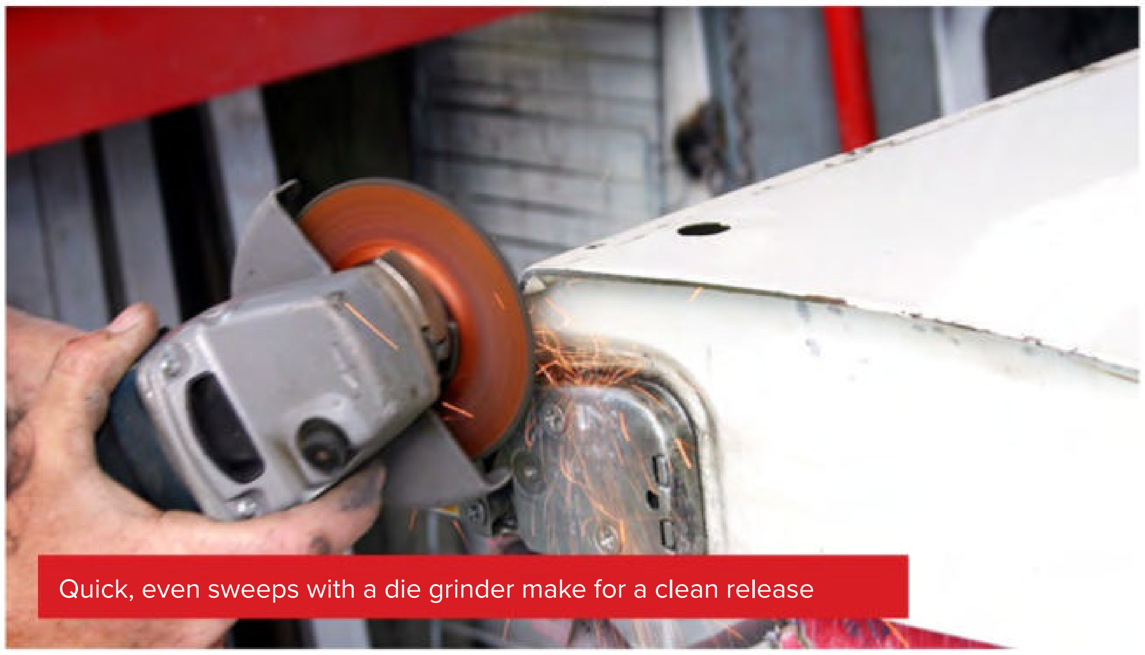
Next, break the spot welds that hold the door skin in position. On



To drill out spot welds without drilling all the way through, a special bit is available


Place the new skin on the door and check for any deviations

> If you have never done bodywork, I would take a class before starting on your classic, or leave this job to a pro, because little mistakes can mount up and make a big mess


Quick, even sweeps with a die grinder make for a clean release

our MGB, there were four. Two of them were near the top of the front lip of the door, and two more were on the rear lip. A special drill bit made for drilling out spot welds does a neat job of breaking the welds, if you can find one.

HAMMER AND DOLLY

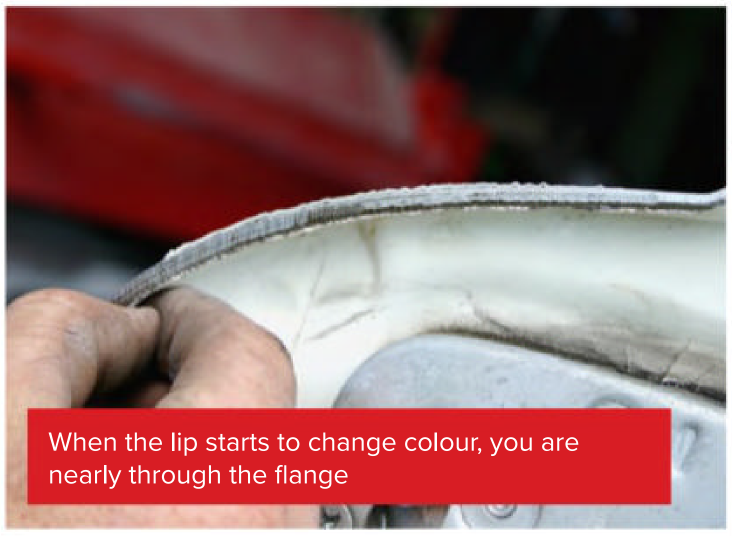
Once the door skin has been popped loose, use a hammer and dolly to take out any ripples in the door flange and to make sure the flange is at the correct angle all around the door.

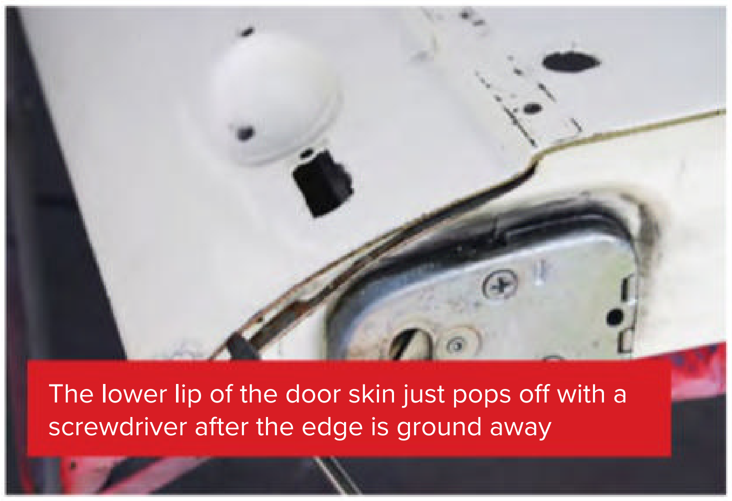
When you have the flange as you want it, give all bare metal a coat of cold galvanising compound to prevent rust. Cold galvanising can be welded over with minimum damage, unlike paint.

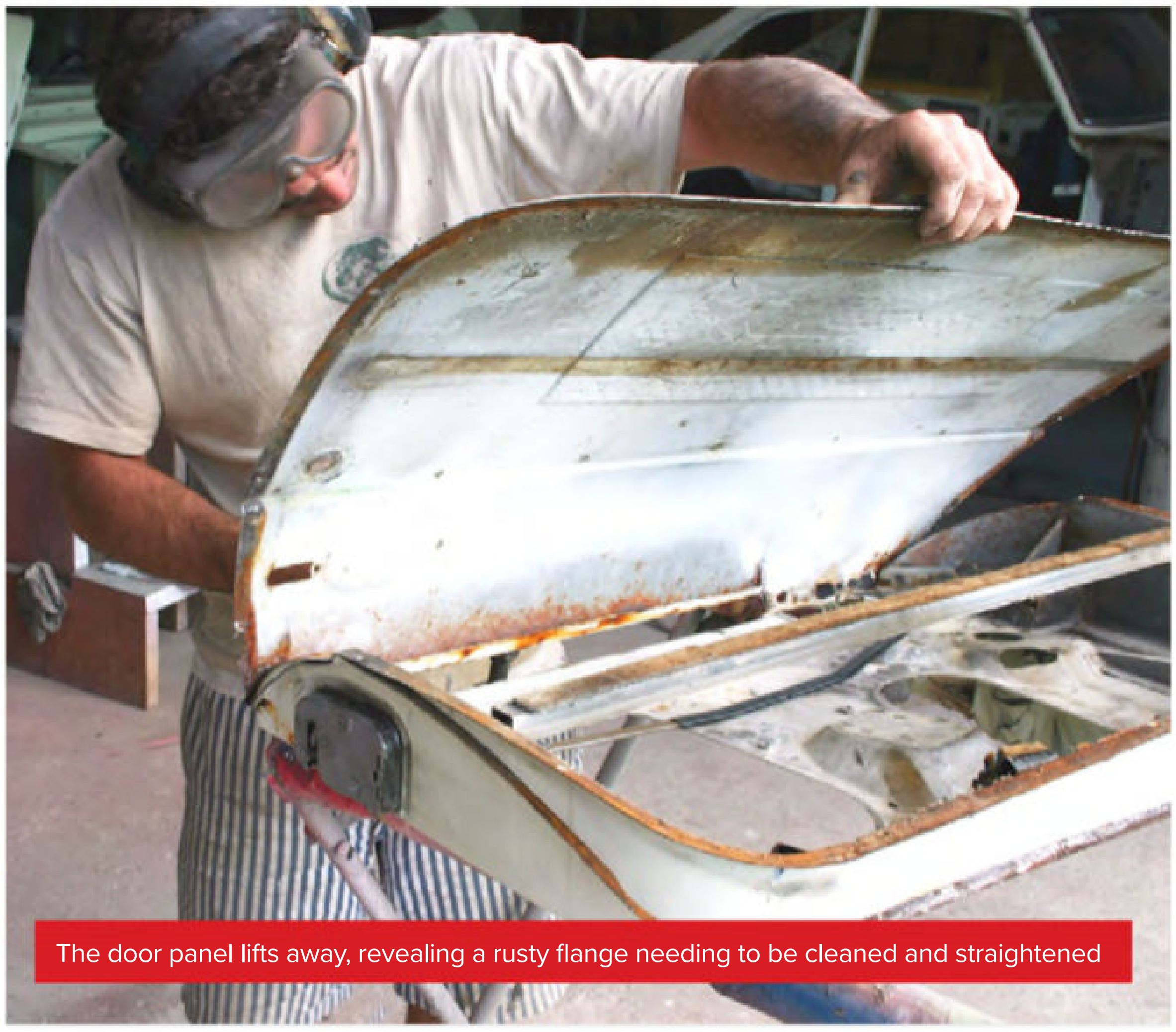
Check the fit of the door before going further. Bruce did this all through the process, and it paid off, because the door fitted perfectly when he was finished. Mount the door back in place with no skin on it so that you can see where its shape deviates from the opening it is supposed to fit into.

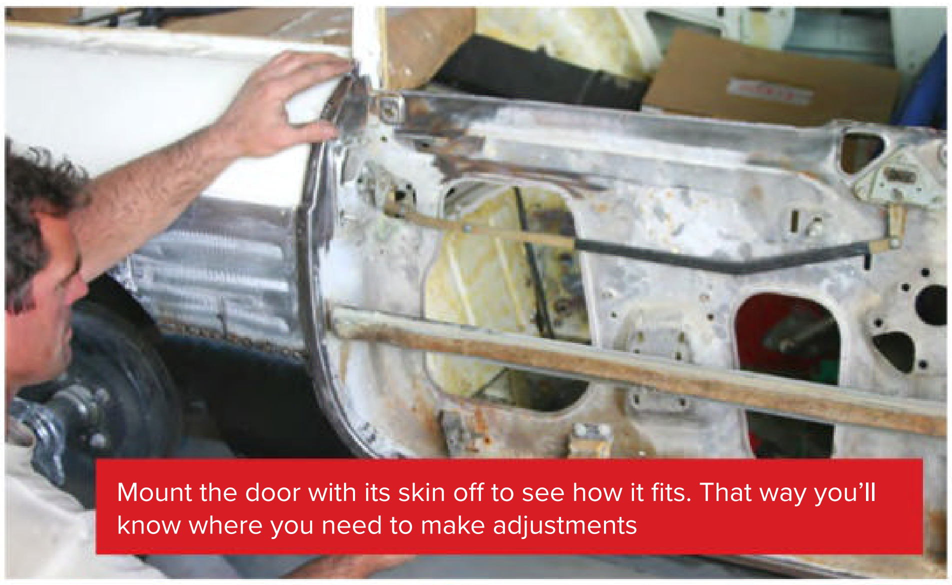
To crimp the door skin over the door frame, use a hammer and dolly, and hold the dolly along the edge at a 45-degree angle while you work. Just bend the lip of the door skin over evenly for your first pass, then check your work again to make sure that everything is going to plan.

Never try to bend the lip over with the dolly back from the flange edge, →

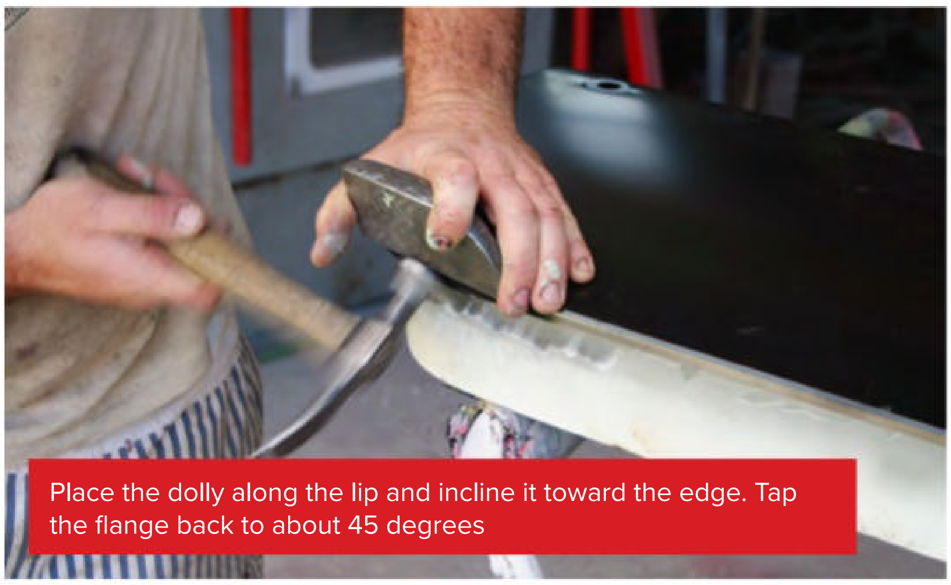

When the lip starts to change colour, you are nearly through the flange


The lower lip of the door skin just pops off with a screwdriver after the edge is ground away


The door panel lifts away, revealing a rusty flange needing to be cleaned and straightened



Mount the door with its skin off to see how it fits. That way you'll know where you need to make adjustments



Place the dolly along the lip and incline it toward the edge. Tap the flange back to about 45 degrees

Sharp corners need to be rounded slightly and sealed so as not to cause problems

To do this job right, check the fit frequently

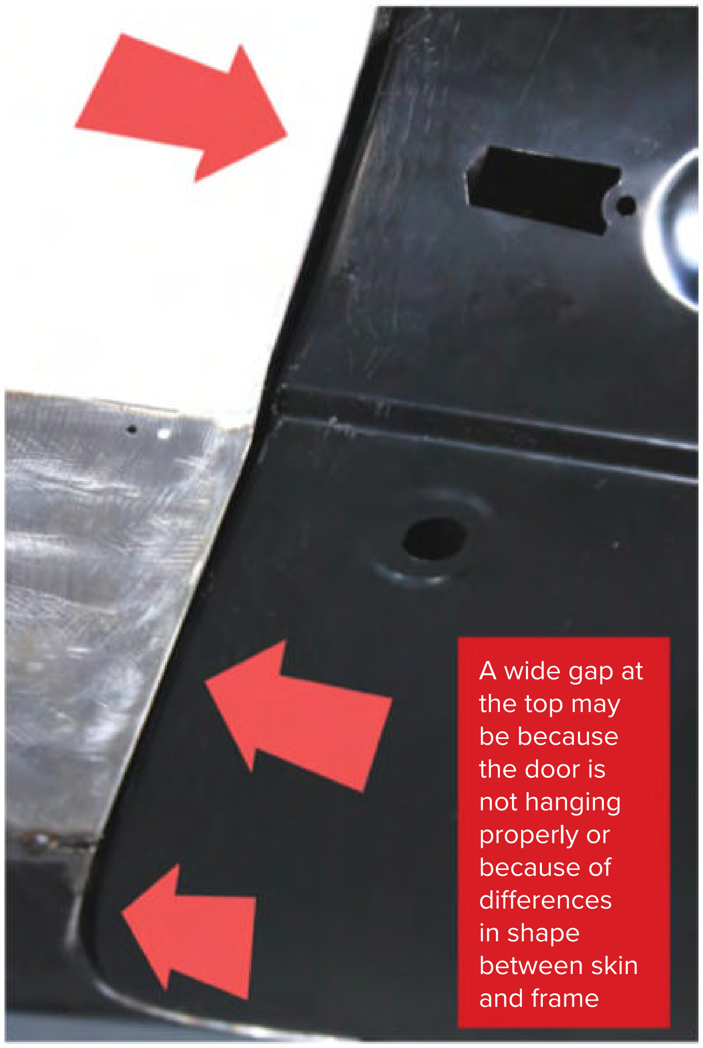
because you will damage the door skin where it meets the lip edge. On our MG door, there was one sharp corner, and Bruce flattened it with a couple of taps so that it would not have a sharp edge.

Again, with the dolly along the lip, tap the door skin flange flat against the door frame. Work your way around the door until the flange is over evenly. Now mount the door and check the fit again. Once the door has been carefully fitted, if the front gap is a little bit wide and the rear gap is tight, gently tap the door skin forward. And, of course, if the door is tight up front after careful fitting, you can tap the skin rearwards.

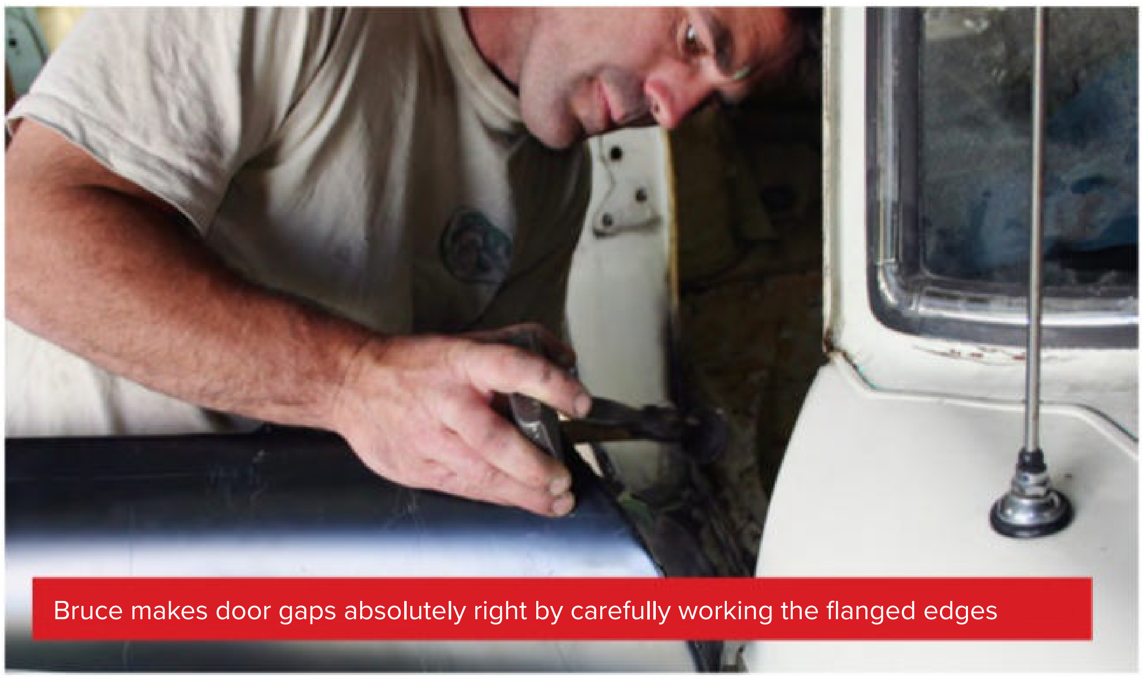
THE RIGHT GAPS

In the case of our MG door, the skin fitted tightly at the centre of the rear gap but was slightly out at the top and bottom. Bruce gently tapped the end of the door in the middle and worked the lip down, then flattened the flange against the door again, thus shortening and flattening the curve where the door was tight. And then he carefully flattened the flange in the area where the door gap was too wide, thus pushing it out towards the gap slightly. This is the stuff that takes experience to get right.

Check the gap all around again, then take the door off and place it on your workbench. Once you have the gaps exactly as you want them, drill the door skin near the original spot welds and weld the skin to the flanges underneath. Grind the welds flat. Mount the door again and make final adjustments. Look everything over carefully, and then do any last hammer work to get the door exactly as you want it. ■



A wide gap at the top may be because the door is not hanging properly or because of differences in shape between skin and frame



Bruce makes door gaps absolutely right by carefully working the flanged edges

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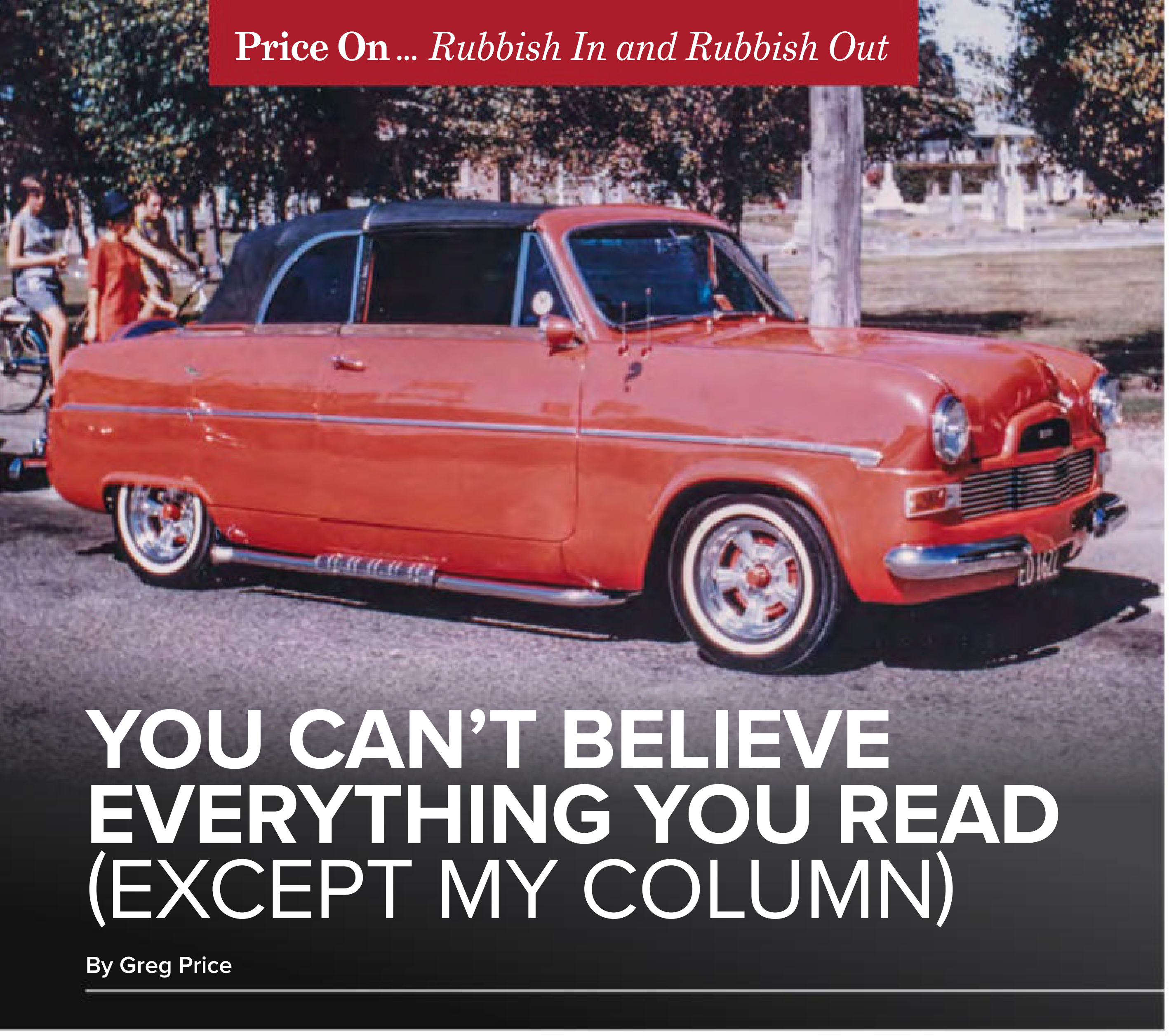


It was not relicensed for the 1974/1975 licensing year, and dropped out of the system

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ (EXCEPT MY COLUMN)

By Greg Price

I had an interesting discussion the other day about Chatbot, and the 'amazing disputable information' it produces. The debate reminded me of our own vehicle database, usually accessible via the likes of carjam.co.nz. Carjam is the main free site from which to gain basic information about a motor vehicle. In the good old days, you could write to the New Zealand Post Office, Motor Registration branch, with your query and, for the princely sum of 50 cents, you could obtain the name and address of the current owner of a motor vehicle. For a heftier investment (wait for it), $2, you could get the full ownership history. This was great for the Register of Ford Zephyr Convertibles that I commenced back in 1975, but the advent of the Privacy Act in 1992 put paid to that.

Fortunately, in relation to my convertible register, I already had many personal details of cars' owners. But the advent of personalised plates frustrated my data compilation. In the space of a few months, the same car might have as many as five different plates, as I soon found out. Eventually, I discovered Carjam. I could enter the latest registration number and be provided with all the numbers ever assigned to that car, but with one significant shortcoming. When the New Zealand Motor Vehicle database was computerised in or around 1992, vehicle owners were not given any meaningful time in which to notify the Land Transport Safety Authority then that a car in its possession was not currently registered but still needed to go into the database. Sceptics think that was the plan.

You cannot link this car to the 'ED1622' plate, using current NZTA data-sharing systems

In addition, if someone de-registered a car, they were required to hand back both plates, removing another source of verification. This meant that a Zephyr convertible that was unregistered at the time of computerisation, yet later certified fit to return to the fleet, had no discernible history prior to 1992! What's worse, the Auckland Consul Zephyr Zodiac Club was nearly caught out after spending many years and thousands of dollars restoring a convertible as a club project. It was unable, initially, to get it back on the road, as there was no history. Fortunately, I knew the person the club had purchased the project car from and could produce the original ownership history, including some early photos of the car wearing its original black and silver plates. Thankfully, the club's project was able to be completed. This convertible's registration had lapsed in 1975 but the government body managing road vehicle registration was simply oblivious to any of this!

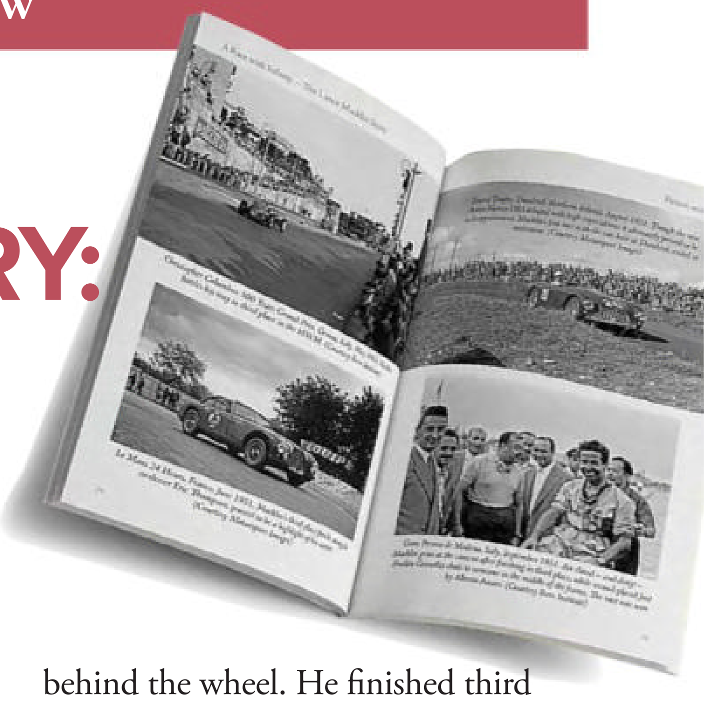
An even bigger problem with the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) database is accuracy. A computer can only produce the information that has previously been entered into it. By way of an example, if you look up my convertible, you'll see that it has apparently failed two recent warrant of fitness (WOF) checks. Wrong. I have the completed check sheets to prove it. It also records that one of the mileage readings is incorrect. Wrong. The reading was fine but the writing was wrong. That's not the first time I've encountered that problem. Once, when I took my Triumph 5TA Speed Twin for a WOF, the tester wrote down the trip meter reading. I gave up trying to get that sorted. I've previously related here the story of one of my motorcycles being registered when new with what turned out to be a bank-note number — simply because the office boy charged with registering it had wandered off to the local post office minus the required information!

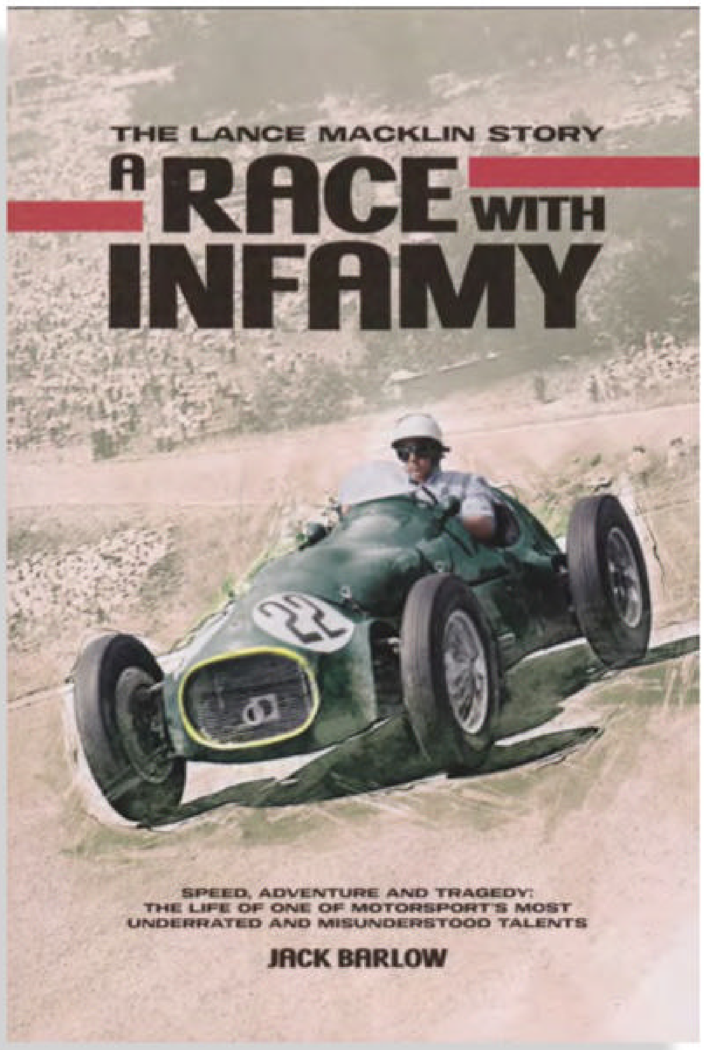
Most important, do not rely on the information about the number of previous owners as provided by Carjam. Both my Zephyrs are recorded as having just one owner in New Zealand, simply because I'd owned them prior to 1992. Because the old hard-copy histories were not manually entered into the computer system, they are not included in the number of owners listed. The other issue is that there is no control over the 'type' of vehicle entered into the system. None of my convertibles was recorded as being a convertible. That kind of distinction was totally dependent on the whim of the Post Office person processing the license application.

If you check my current convertible's listing, it will tell you that there are 104 similar models in New Zealand. Wrong; it's not even a 1955 model, it's a 1954! That '104' figure is the number of Ford Zephyrs registered, of any body style. Meanwhile, I am slowly working through my records and compiling the actual histories of cars that seem to be different vehicles but are in fact the same cars with different plates.

Clearly, asking Chatbot would be no use, because the database it would call on is laughably full of errors. ■

THE LANCE MACKLIN STORY: A RACE WITH INFAMY




THE LANCE MACKLIN STORY
A RACE WITH INFAMY
SPEED, ADVENTURE AND TRAGEDY: THE LIFE OF ONE OF MOTORSPORT'S MOST UNDERRATED AND MISUNDERSTOOD TALENTS
JACK BARLOW

Jack Barlow. Published 2022 by Veloce.
ISBN 978-1-787117-87-7

Review by Mark Holman

In Richard Williams's enjoyable book on Stirling Moss,* he refers to fellow racer Lance Macklin as Moss's "debonair teammate who showed Moss how to widen the scope of his social life".

Throughout this biography of that teammate, by New Zealand–born author Jack Barlow, Macklin's dedication to widening his own scope is made clear. For Macklin, chasing 'crumpet', as fun-loving girls tended to be called then, seemed as essential to the racing life as oxygen. Macklin's father, Noel, sounds like a rather daunting, distant, but successful man, who also had an adventurous streak, spending six months in a rented villa in Monte Carlo, developing ways of beating the casino. Although Lance had proved himself during war-time service in the Royal Navy, he often seemed to be seeking paternal approval.

Macklin's early racing career got him noticed by Aston Martin for the 1949 season. Moving to single-seaters with Hersham and Walton Motors (HWM), Lance began racing in Formula 2 and Formula 1 (F1). Not all F1 races were grands prix, which count towards a world championship, then. The cars were under-powered and under-financed but Macklin had some decent results in non-championship races. He might have done better had he not been so frequently distracted by the opposite sex. He lost his Aston Martin contract for reasons along these lines.

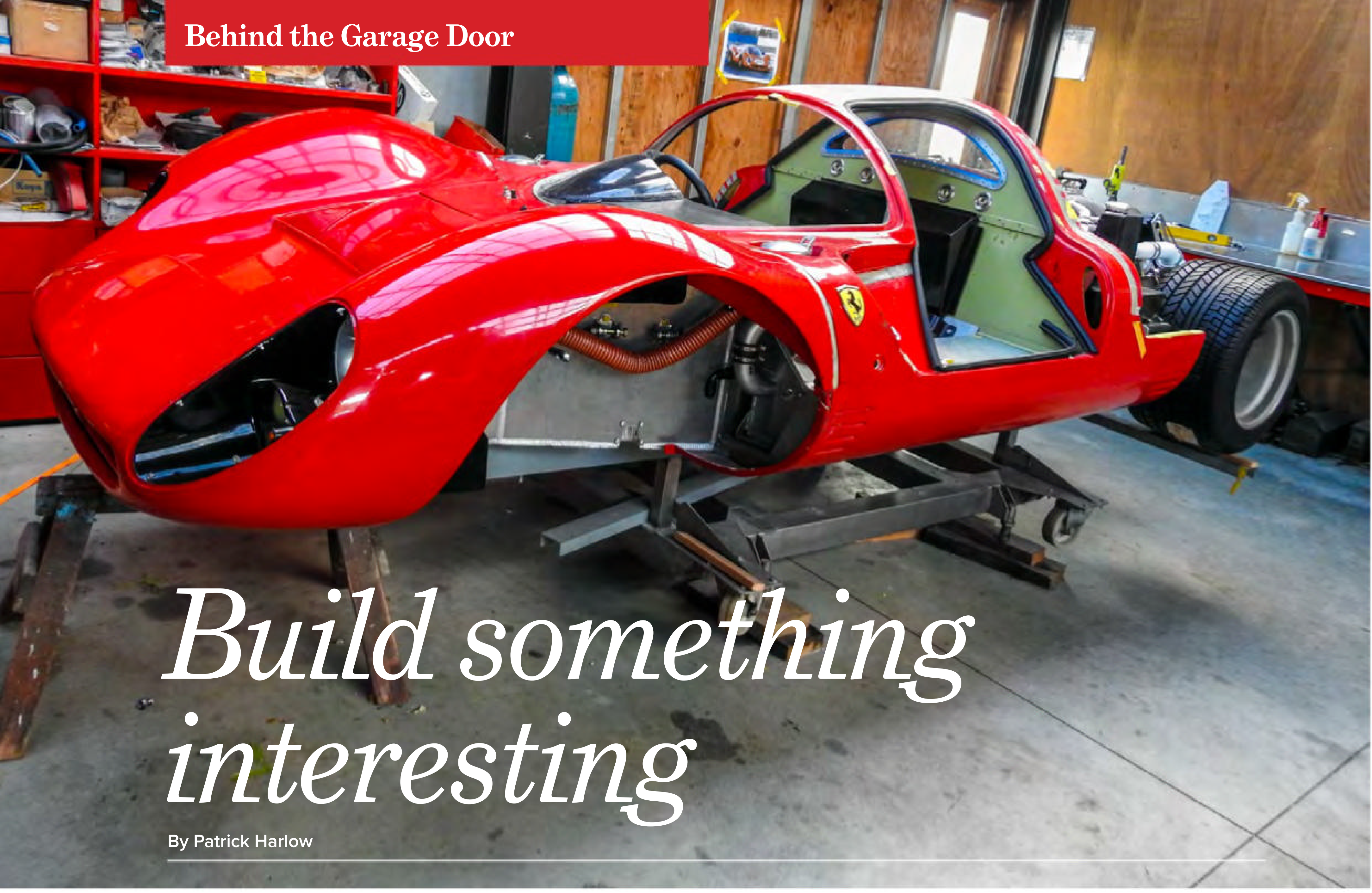
It was not the only time that his laissez-faire personality counted against his racing progress, yet there were times when Macklin demonstrated real talent behind the wheel. He finished third at Le Mans in 1951, but what was perhaps his most impressive drive is easily overlooked: in 1954, he raced an Austin-Healey 100 single-handed over 1000 miles on Italian roads to finish fifth in his class.

When Macklin finished racing, he played a role in the development of export markets for Facel Vega. He also made some poor business decisions, and his personal life was often rather complex. One of his most unlikely moves took place in 1968 when he accompanied his new Kiwi wife back to New Zealand. After Lance failed to make a career out of various jobs, they ended up running a fish and chip shop in Ōtaki. Even then it seems that his wife did the bulk of the work, as Lance preferred to reminisce with customers.

I've left the 1955 Le Mans disaster until last. Lance Macklin was an unwitting participant in the awful crash that killed more than 80 people when his Austin-Healey strayed into the path of Pierre Levegh's Mercedes-Benz, almost certainly because Mike Hawthorn swooped into the Jaguar pit in front of him. Levegh's car was launched into the crowd, killing him and many spectators in motor sport's deadliest accident. The layout of the circuit itself was also a key cause. That experience dogged the rest of Lance's life. Incidentally, it's my understanding that Le Mans races were started by dropping the French flag, not by a starting pistol, as the author suggests.

The book is a small hardback of just 216 pages, but it is packed with a great deal of interesting reading. It is strong both on its racing coverage and on Lance's personal life, as the book benefits from the author's diligence in contacting so many people who knew Macklin and were happy to share their mostly fond memories of him. Definitely recommended.

***The Boy: Stirling Moss — A Life in 60 Laps*. Published 2021 by Simon & Schuster. ■



Build something interesting

By Patrick Harlow

After a lifetime of racing Formula Fords and even making it to the New Zealand Grand Prix, Ian decided that he wanted a bit of a challenge. It should be something that would use his skills as a mechanical engineer, and he thought building a car would fit the bill. Naturally, if he was going to build a car, it had to be something that would hold his interest during and after the build, so he started checking out the more esoteric end of the kit car field. At first, it was going to be a Lancia Stratos replica, and he investigated the cost of bringing one out from the UK.

While he was doing this, he came across RCR, or Race Car Replicas, in the US. RCR had been around since 2003 and had built a business delivering kits all around the globe. Two items of interest caught Ian's eye. The first was that the company manufactured most of its cars with aluminium monocoque chassis. The second was that, besides a range of GT40, Lola, Porsche, and Jaguar replicas, it also produced a version of Ian's dream car: a replica of the legendary Ferrari P4 — perhaps one of the prettiest cars in the world.

Ian made inquiries with the Detroit-based company. He was told that while it had already built a couple of Ferrari P4s, he would have to wait, as the firm was flat out building cars for the 2019 *Ferrari v Ford* film. All of the Ferrari P4s in the movie were made by RCR.

The gear selector is a work of art and something that Ian bought in addition to the kit

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Impressed with their résumé, Ian decided to go with the P4 body and chassis. He then began what turned into a real mission — locating an engine for it. He spent hours searching for a suitable Ferrari V12 engine on the internet. He found three engines but they were very expensive and had to be shipped from Europe or the UK, adding to the cost. Luck was on his side, however.

He was searching the web for a set of Ferrari Dino mirrors for another project, when he stumbled across a partly disassembled 575 engine for sale here in New Zealand. The 575 had been crashed and the engine had suffered some damage, including bent valves. On the upside, it had only covered 2000km and the previous owner had carried out all the necessary repairs. The engine had arrived in New Zealand partially disassembled but still in the car. As the engine was in Invercargill, Ian asked the owner

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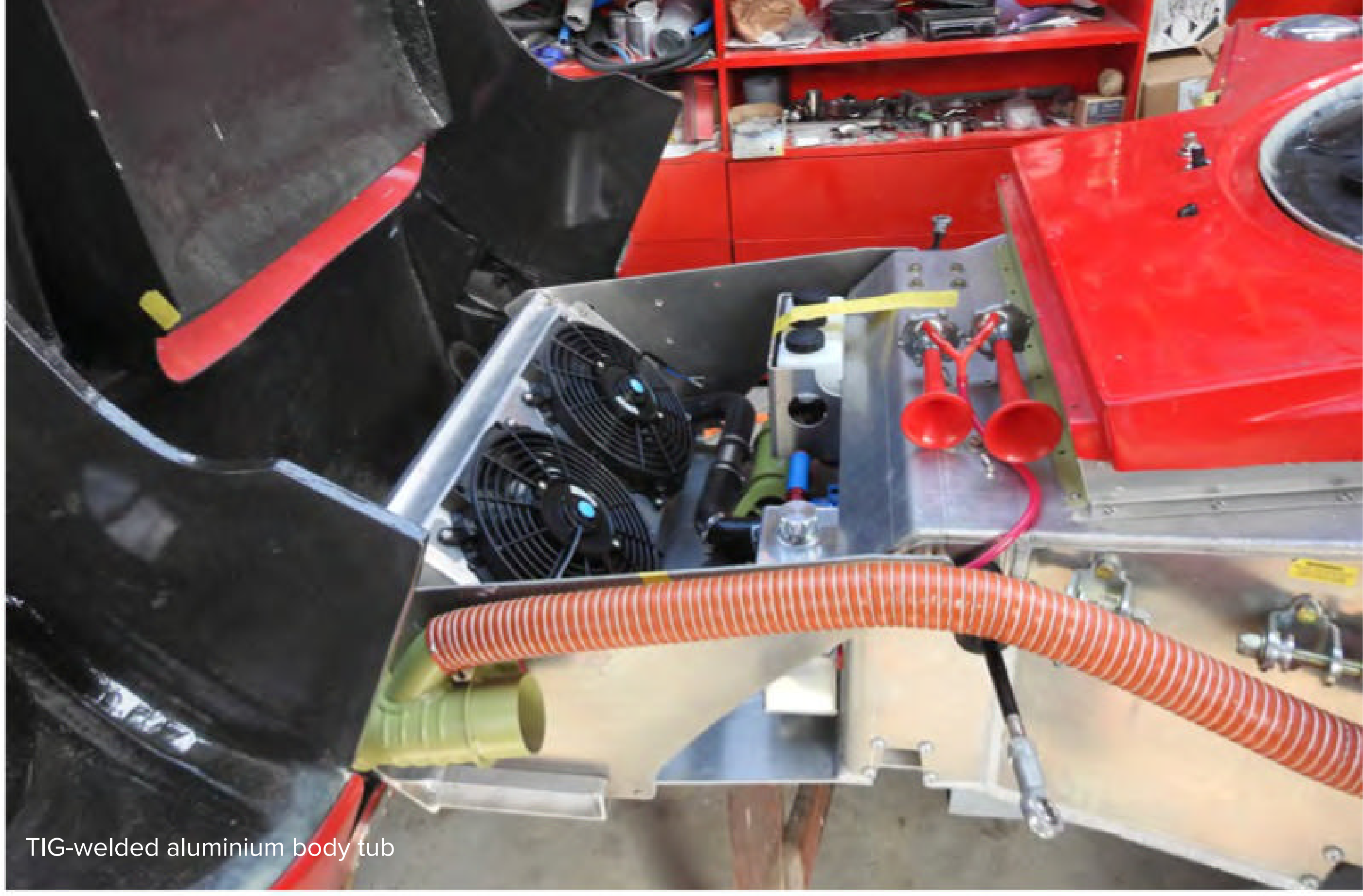

TIG-welded aluminium body tub

to take several pictures, which were emailed to him in Auckland. It looked like all the parts were there. Ian decided to take a punt and buy it.

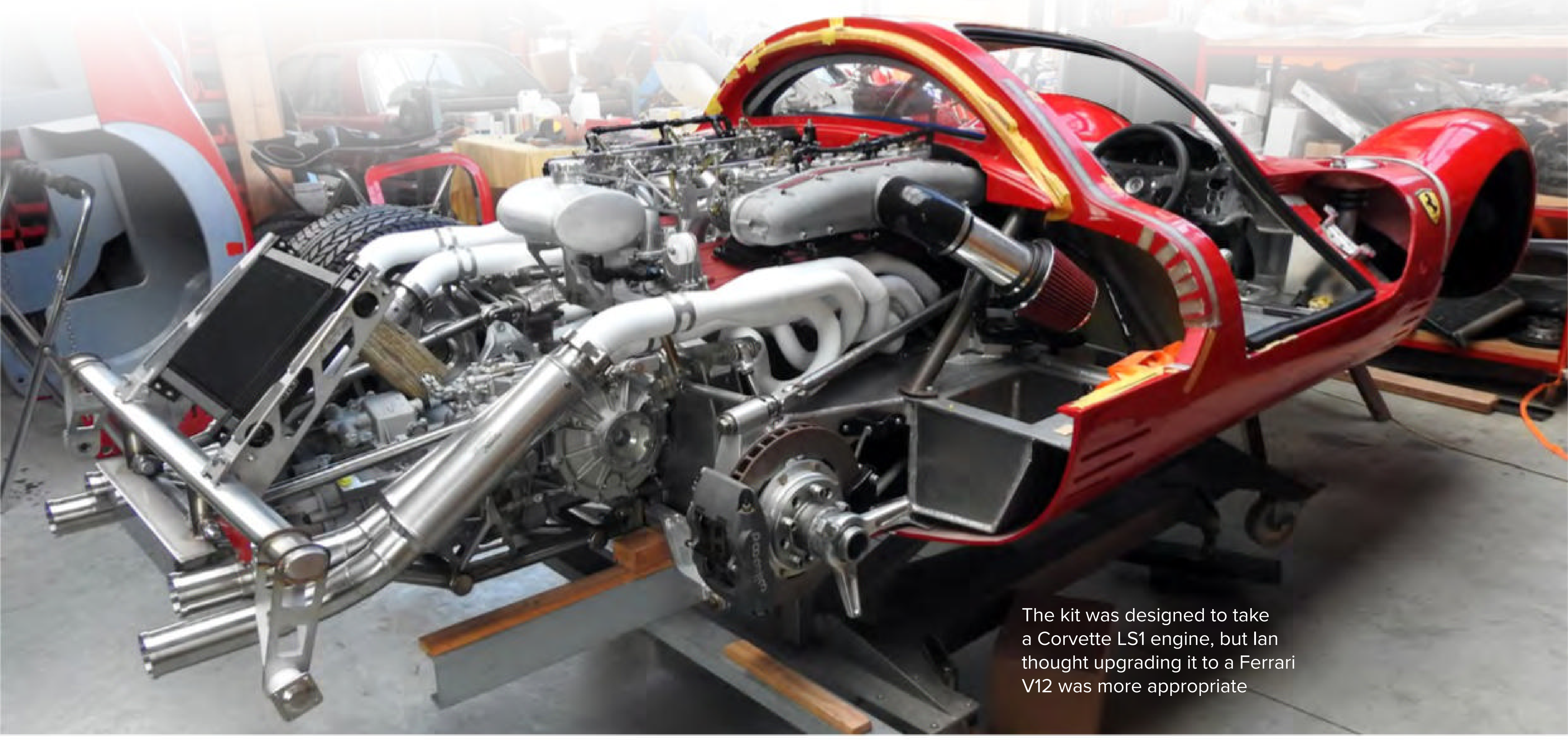
Once he had the engine, Ian placed an order with RCR for a P4 chassis and body. During the long wait, he checked out and assembled the engine. In due course, in the latter half of 2019, the car arrived from RCR. It was a rolling chassis containing boxes and boxes of parts containing almost everything that he would need to build the car. The gauges were electronic but looked period. The only major component not included in the kit was the wiring loom. As Ian was going to use a more modern Ferrari V12 anyway, he would need to build his own bespoke loom.

RIGHT FROM THE START

The chassis arrived in right-hand-drive format. Interestingly, the four original Ferrari P4s were all right-hand drive — which was very fortunate, as home-built left-hand-drive cars cannot be registered road legal in New Zealand. The RCR chassis had been designed to take a Chev LS1 V8 engine, so one of Ian's first tasks was to rejig it to take his Ferrari V12. He also had to adapt the engine to fit the Graziano gearbox and transaxle that came with the kit. The Graziano is the same set-up used in the Lamborghini Gallardo and Audi R8, so Ian is confident that it will have no problem handling the 5.7-litre Ferrari V12's 379kW.

Ian has swapped out the fuel injection for six Weber side-draught carburettors, which look more period correct. Doing away with the Ferrari 575's computer will also simplify the build slightly. Another change he made was to move the gear-lever from the centre console to mount it in the door sill — another change that gives the build a more authentic look. As the door sills also house the fuel tanks, Ian had to notch the driver's side fuel tank to make room for the gear-lever and the distinctive Ferrari pattern gate.

The car will not be an exact replica of the racing cars, but, with a genuine Ferrari engine at its heart, it makes a better tribute to the original P4s than many modern builds, but with appropriate concessions made for road legality and the practicalities of construction. ■


The kit was designed to take a Corvette LS1 engine, but Ian thought upgrading it to a Ferrari V12 was more appropriate

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PUTTING THE BEGG ON THE MAP

Three days of socialising, motor racing and entertainment kicked off the inaugural George Begg Festival in Invercargill, celebrating the life and achievements of a local legend

By Quinton Taylor, photography by Quinton Taylor and Transport World

Organisers of the inaugural George Begg Festival held in Invercargill from 30 March to 2 April have hailed the support of competitors, vendors, visitors and locals saying they were delighted to see so much enthusiasm for this new event.

Motorcycle racer, racing car constructor, and farm machinery engineer George Begg created a legacy in his Drummond 'Toyshed' in Western Southland, set to now be celebrated with a festival every two years.

Begg / McLaren display

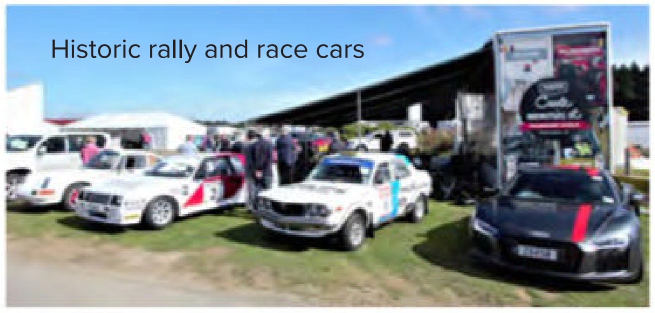
DRIVING FORCE

The 2023 event drew widespread praise from all quarters, many taking to social media to express their delight. An event on this scale organised by a team of volunteers led by Scott and Jocelyn 'Joc' O'Donnell – the driving force behind the Bill Richardson Transport World and Classic Motorcycle Mecca –was never going to be an easy undertaking but it is set to be an internationally recognised event after such a great start.

George's daughter, Jacqui Blake, was over from Australia for the event and she was thrilled to see it all happening. "I thought it was a fantastic event. What really got me was how everybody was enjoying it. There was just that enjoyment, camaraderie and a common interest in motorsport." →

George's daughter Jacqui Blake was a teenager when her family accompanied David Oxton racing in Europe

David Oxton with Greg Murphy


Historic rally and race cars

Greg Murphy heading out in Denny Hulme's McLaren M23

Classic Motorcycle Mecca display team

Lunchtime tractor races

Jim Murdoch with 019, the last of 18 Begg cars

STAR ATTRACTIONS

Australian motoring legend and invited driver John Bowe said he was blown away by the level of enthusiasm he experienced in the classic racing scene as well as having the opportunity to reunite with his successful Ford Sierra.

The weather and Cook Strait ferry meant some cars didn't arrive in time for the event which led to the team of star drivers swapping drives in local racing cars.

Johnny Reid took his first racing drive in a front-wheel-drive car, sharing a Nissan Primera with Greg Murphy. Murphy also took the wheel in the lunchtime tractor race. Angus Fogg delighted spectators with his antics in his potent Amco Mini Cooper, joining in the fun with local Howard Kingsford-Smith in his Brink Morris Cooper S.

Getting in the theme

Tribute to Ford

John Bowe with the 'Carabinieri'

TW girls searching for their driver

And the winner is …

Girls just want to have fun

Lone Lamborghini of Ross Graham chased by Porsche'

Porsche' marquee

Brendon Hartley's Le Mans (mockup) Porsche'

Lovely 356

Both were dressed in period attire. Angus also eagerly accepted an offer from Steve Ross to share a stint with Greg Murphy in the PDL Mustang.

A bit of an experiment occurred when HVRA members joined in the fun handicap races with the Pre-78 Classic cars for some great races. It was great to see the mix of marques putting on an entertaining show over the weekend.

Other highlights on the track were the sound of Formula One cars, and the return of Formula 5000, Formula Two, and Formula Pacific to Teretonga Park.

In between the races there were plenty of food stalls and other attractions around to capture visitors attention and off the track there was plenty of nighttime entertainment.

Porsche' club members celebrated the marque's 75th anniversary with lunchtime parades. Other circulating were a large contingent of classic Ford owners, historic rally cars and of course the stars of the event, those Begg racing cars.→

Super quick and unbeatable 997 of Scott O'Donnell

Large VCC grid

Grant Clearwater chases Paul Coghill through GWD corner

From crumpled wreck to this beautiful result: Gary Johnstone's Jaguar XJS

MUST-DO EVENT

Festival owner Scott O'Donnell says the long-term vision for the George Begg Festival is to create a must-do event for New Zealanders and international visitors. The goal is to create a positive ripple effect for Invercargill's accommodation providers, retailers, and hospitality businesses and reinforce Invercargill's growing reputation as the classic motoring capital of New Zealand

"We'd like the George Begg Festival to become the New Zealand version of the Goodwood Revival in the United Kingdom. We want the George Begg Festival to become an event that has huge name recognition, which people really want to be part of," he says.

"Our next event, in 2025, will be a celebration of all things Italian in the motoring world – including the fine food and wine the country is known for."

MARLBOROUGH HOSPICE VEHICLE SHOW

FORD CLUB MARLBOROUGH
CS 3041

By Steve Reid

The organisers of this year's show couldn't have asked for better weather with well over 400 cars, bikes, trucks and boats descending on the Waterlea Racecourse in Blenheim for this ever popular day out in March 19.

This annual event has quickly become well known for bringing the unseen, or long forgotten about, vehicles out of the woodwork and this year was no exception. From the cars of yesteryear through to two 2022 C8 Corvettes - and with many cars from Nelson coming over the hill- there was something there to catch the eye of everyone who attended.

Entertainment was once again supplied by the Scottish Highland Pipe band along with the local Rock and Roll Club. Grandpa Simpson was also on deck with his model cars for sale, so if you couldn't afford the real thing then you could take home a model of the car of your dreams.

Once again a generous donation has been made to the local Hospice.

A YEAR OUT DIDN'T HURT AMERICAN VEHICLE DAY

Last year's Covid cancellation only meant more and better prepared cars turned up for this year's show

By Christopher Moor

Last year, Covid restrictions forced the cancellation of American Vehicle Day, legislation over fearsome little germs doing something that even the wildest weather couldn't manage in the show's 20 year plus history.

But we bounced back and the day celebrating American automobiles was the first car show to return to the Hutt Valley after the break of a year.

Given extra time to gather strength the show on Trentham Racecourse concourse on 5 February was as big as it ever had been, hundreds of cars making this another winner for Moonshine Rod and Custom Club.

Cars were coming and going from midmorning until early afternoon, making it a challenge to see them all. It certainly lived up to its reputation for attracting more cars than any other to the lower half of the North Island.

While the focus is obviously on American metal Moonshine's displays have attracted cars originating across the globe since 2016. North of the grandstands, the Holdens, Falcons, and a Chrysler SE were parked up with a Porsche, Jaguar, Aston Martin, and a Mini Clubman.

After walking back to the main concourse, those dinky offerings made the two 1960s Lincoln Continental limousines I saw seem even longer than their five and a half or so metres.

There was a touch of nostalgia for this Hutt Valley boy in seeing Chevrolets, Dodges, and Fords that would have rolled off the assembly lines at Petone and Seaview during the mid-1950s-early 1960s.

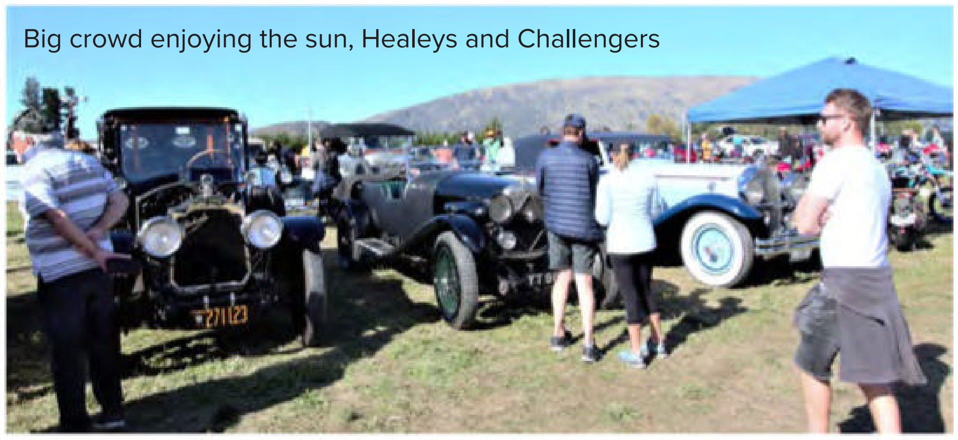
The 2023 edition was the day of the Chevrolet, the American car with the greatest number present. The paintwork and chrome on those Impalas had a deeply imbued lustre – their owners weren't among those I caught giving their cars a quick polish up.

Looking every bit as immaculate as the younger Impalas was Rob Fern's 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air convertible. Rob was one of those behind the formation of Super Chevy Sunday and has returned to New Zealand after a spell in Australia. It was good catching up with him and his classic again.

Proceeds from American Vehicle Day again went to Te Omanga Hospice, assisting an invaluable Hutt Valley asset. Long may this last!

356 marking 75 Years of Porsche

Tractors and steam engines of every description



Big crowd enjoying the sun, Healeys and Challengers

WHEELS AT WANAKA ON THE MOVE

“If it’s got wheels or it’s got tracks, It will be here!” – Allan Dippie

By Quinton Taylor

It started as an experiment in 2019 to see if it would catch the public’s interest . Such is its success, the third bi-annual ‘Wheels At Wanaka’ show is beginning to outgrow its original site.

Developed from an original concept by local businessman, tractor, and car enthusiast Allan Dippie, it now takes a huge group of mainly volunteers to run the Easter event. It has grown into a unique and highly successful event that attracts people from all over the country and even further afield, as an elated Allan Dippie explains. He says some volunteers came from as far afield as Holland.

“This was the best Wheels at Wanaka we have had and the third one we have had. We started in 2019 with 15,000 people and then 25,000 and now 45,000 this weekend. We couldn’t have got it better weather-wise so that bought everybody out. Five thousand on practice day, 25,000 on the main day and then 15,000 on Sunday; it was just perfect weather.”

A number of charities and organisations benefited from the event such as the West Otago Vintage Club along with a host of local organisations such as Rotary, the gym and rowing clubs. The main charity beneficiary was Cure Our Ovarian Cancer.

“It’s just a huge team effort, really,” says Allan. “There are just so many components to it. It is wheels in motion – unlike most car shows, everything is moving all the time. I think we did a really good job of entertaining people which is what people want these days. It’s no good just going to a car show to see static displays. You need to be entertained.➔

BMW powered Plus 6 – 335bhp (250kw)

John Deere bought the John Froelich, Waterloo Boy Co in 1918

Greg Murphy tries his skills on a Mack Titan

GOODMANS
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Impressive Jaguar XK150

A shortage of tractor operators!

First time on gravel, Tony Brand's Bedford race truck

8
TRANSDIESEL

Duesenberg Model J, ex-Carol Lombard

Morgans

Austin-Healey club members touring the South Island

Used on every major construction project, the Caterpillar D9

MOVING SPECTACLE

"There is no other event quite like it in the world, I have to say. It has grown, but not by accident. It has grown into something pretty amazing. You can watch a veteran car parading around a ring one minute and then the next Hayden Paddon comes in in his rally car. It's got so many components; earthmoving to cars to tractors."

Guest Australian motoring announcer Greg Rust kept everyone well informed while motor racing celebrity Greg Murphy entertained with all sorts of antics.

"He was driving a scraper, trucks, dirt bikes and all sorts of things. It was really good having Greg Rust and Greg Murphy there as they are top class commentators. They make it. If you have good commentators and keep people entertained – and they did – it's all about entertainment.

"Our motivation is putting a smile on people's faces and bringing back some childhood memories. Our target market is five years old to ninety-five and it's a real family event. We get little kids driving diggers and all sorts of things, and some of the operators who made their careers on some of the equipment, and there were a lot of people seeing cars that their dad had."

Event coordinator Allan Dippie, and passenger Greg Murphy, in his Hispano-Suiza-powered Delage leading the vintage aero-engine racer display

Citroen Traction Avant

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Wheels at Wanaka was now at a stage where the suitability of its current site had to be considered, Allan said.

"It will outgrow the location, I think, because the show is getting bigger. It's becoming pretty well-known throughout the country now and the place to come every second Easter, well, every Easter now with our sister event back next year which is the Warbirds Over Wanaka. They lost a couple of shows with Covid so they won't have had an airshow for six years, so Wanaka is pretty much on the map for Easter time, which is good fun."

Despite problems with the Cook Strait ferries and recent storm damage in the North Island a lot of equipment still came down from the North Island, he said,

"Hats off to those guys, they really put in an amazing effort to get here." →

The most Dodge Challengers ever seen in the south

Popular Ford MKII Cortinas

Leaning Rock and Dunstan Range Trek, Thursday 6 April

LAND ROVER 75TH RALLY

By Quinton Taylor, photography by Colin Brown

Land Rover was easily the best represented marque at this year's Wheels at Wanaka event. In total, 171 rally packs were sent out signalling four days of trekking and camaraderie in some fairly inaccessible parts of Central Otago to celebrate 75 years of Land Rover.

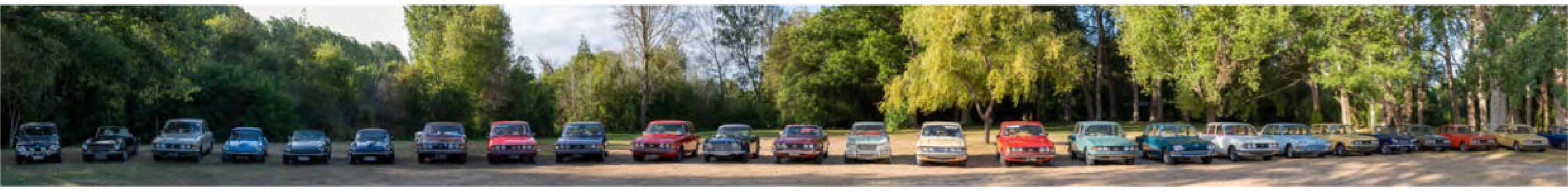
Organisers Rod and Anne Corbett were thrilled to have all treks fully subscribed which culminated in a Friday evening barbecue in Wanaka. They then shared their passion with the Wheels at Wanaka crowd over Easter in a parade of some 200 Land Rovers.

There can be few New Zealanders who have never ridden in one.

Kevin Scurr's delightfully original 'Cardona Rabbit Board', Series I Land Rover received the 'Best Land Rover at Wheels 2023' award. Sean Marr led the parade in his 1948 tribute to the Series 1 Land Rover first sold in England.

Leaning Rock and Dunstan Range Trek, Thursday 6 April

Old Man and the Obelisk Trek, Wednesday April 5



INTERNATIONAL DRIVE YOUR TRIUMPH DAY

By Chris Barker, photography by Terry Casey

This is an annual event to celebrate Sir John Black's Birthday. John Black was the man who organized Standard's purchase of Triumph after WWII and went on to make the cars that many of us enjoy driving today.

This year is particularly special, as it is now 100 years since the first Triumph car was produced in 1923.

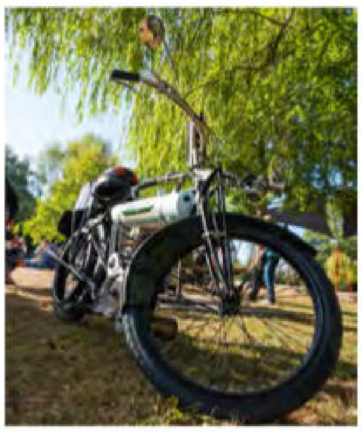
International Drive Your Triumph Day has gained momentum every year, last year the Organiser received over 600 photos from all over the world: Scotland, Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Uruguay, Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, Canada, Holland, Czech Republic, and the USA.

On February 10th a selection of 26 Triumph cars of different models joined together in Christchurch for a short drive in convoy ending up at a picnic area and reserve that we had hired for the evening.

A special mention must be made of the oldest vehicle present, a 1913 Triumph vintage motorcycle in pristine condition.

Much fun, food and laughter were enjoyed by everyone and we had new Club members join us for the first time along with some new membership inquiries.

We wish to thank everyone who made the effort to come along and be part of something special!



CLASSIC CAR GATHERING

By Trevor Stanley Joblin, photography by Terry Casey

On February 26th the first ever display to focus on vehicles manufactured in Europe was a great success with 58 vehicles on display. Taking in consideration that this was the first time that this event was trialled, we were happy with the numbers. We can now hope that this will set the trend for future years. The classic of the month was awarded to Colin Busch for his magnificent 1956 Porsche 356 cabriolet. Compliments of the site venue, the Better Half kitchen and bar in Leithfield, North Canterbury. Colin was presented with a meal voucher for two, to be redeemed at the event sponsor.

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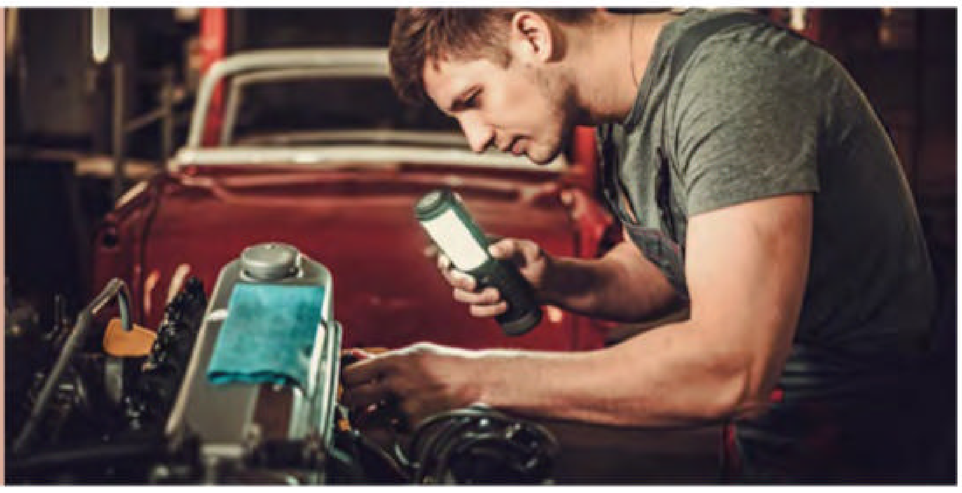

HERON RELEASED BACK INTO THE WILD

By Patrick Harlow

Tom Wichman grew up just like any other boy would in Hamilton. As a pre-schooler, his dad drove him around in a car that Tom has no memories of but, as his father talked about it often, he remembered the name. It was a Heron MJ1. When he was old enough to recognise cars, the Heron was long gone, but it was clear that his father was still keen on the car.

The Heron was a sports car manufactured in limited numbers in Rotorua in the mid ’80s. What makes it unique is that, despite its small production run, it is the country’s most prolific mass-produced car. If that was not enough, Heron is one of very few companies that mass-produced monocoque fibreglass sports cars anywhere in the world. It was not a kit car; people who bought it were given the keys and most were driven straight out of the factory by their new owners.

One day, Tom’s brother, Taylor, found a Heron for sale on the internet. It was their dad’s old car. The family decided to buy it for Dad as a surprise present for his 50th birthday. Towards the end of the auction, only two people were bidding, and Tom found out the competing bidder had a Heron and lived just south of Hamilton. Tom won the auction, and his dad got his Heron MJ1. However, his interest piqued, Tom arranged to call in on the other bidder. The other bidder’s car was in a sad state. The owner had started to pull it apart to do it up. It was now a non-runner sitting forlornly with about 16 boxes of parts gathered around it.

Tom offered to buy it. The owner declined, but took his number anyway. Shortly after, Tom received the call he had been hoping for, and, at 24 years of age, he became the owner of his own Heron. Tom estimated that it would take about nine months to get the car mobile again. The previous owner, with experience on his side, thought that Tom was dreaming, but when Tom got it home, it became a father–son project. Apart from the wiring, which was completely replaced by Tom’s dad, all the parts were there.

The car was on the restoration register so it did not have to be certified. Two weeks after getting the car home, it was back on the road with a WOF and registration. Six years have now passed; the car has proven to be reliable and an attention-getting daily driver.

The greatest moment Tom had with the car was when its designer and creator, Ross Baker, hopped in the passenger seat and Tom took him for a ride. The way Tom felt, it might have been Enzo Ferrari in the passenger seat.

NEXT MONTH

#388

ON SALE 19 JUNE

The legendary GT40

Building a car from scratch requires patience, skill, and hard work. In our next issue, we feature a near-perfect tribute to the legendary Ford GT40, a car that has captured the hearts of car enthusiasts for many generations. Having won the prestigious Le Mans race four times in a row, from 1966, when Bruce McLaren and Chris Amon triumphed, to 1969, the GT40 is widely regarded as one of the most iconic and influential American cars ever made.

This sleek and aerodynamic design made the car a symbol of power, speed, and style, and it has been the subject of countless tribute builds over the years — but few have been as impressive as Brian Stuart’s sublime example.

Home away from home

The LT is VW’s forgotten and usually overlooked gem, but when owners Greg and Fran discovered this van on arriving in London with an extended family of varying ages in tow, it seemed the perfect choice for converting into a suitable camper.

Now back in New Zealand, the camper is used regularly and has been the preferred mode of transport and accommodation for many a family holiday. It has covered a great deal of the country, providing a home away from home for short trips, impromptu overnighters, and longer excursions, gracing many beautiful locations.

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